

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF AN
EDUCATED FALLEN WOMAN

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By
+
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Published by
R. Chakravartty
Isvarganj,
Mymensingh.



Agent,
BIDYASAGAR LIBRARY
Book Selling & Publishing House
31A, Cornwallis St., Calcutta

1-83 Pages Printed by N. C. Sen At the Sakha P.
31, Musalmanpara Lane, Calcutta,
and the rest at the Vidyodaya Press
10/1A, Beaden Street, Calcutta

AN APOLOGIA

The autobiography of an educated fallen woman—many may doubt the idea behind it. Lives of great men, great as they are, are never the complete picture of humanity. My life itself is far from being great or noble, on the contrary it is its antithesis. But the ideal that has prompted me to write this book is great and noble. A sinner and infamous woman as I am, I have nothing more to gain from this world in the nature of human praise. So, I could chronicle the inner records of my life with greater sincerity. Great men, as they are, they are forced to conceal much. If one is to protect oneself from vices, one should know of its nature. It is just because I knew not the face of Satan in the days when I was young and pure, I—and why I—thousands like me, to-day live the abominable life of a prostitute.

Out of the hard realistics and repentance of a prostitute life, this book is born. Those people who imagine our lives to be a path of roses only and who seek eagerly our company, should know that if there is hell anywhere, it is in our lives.

I am a despised being—I live outside the pale of society; of course, that is the proper scheme of society, but my autobiography would disclose some pictures of those pseudo-honest men, those lewds that daily come in contact with us and yet occupy the highest seats of honour in our society. You would simply be

astonished to know how these pests of society can ruin the honour and glory of a virgin

Necessity has prompted me to cite in this my autobiography the names of the following great men, the late Shibnath Shastri, the late Sir Surendranath, the late Deshabandhu C R. Das, the late Byomkesh Chakravarty, the late Aswini Kumar Dutta, Sreejukta Basanti Devi, Sontosh Kumari Gupta, Urmila Devi, Sunity Devi, Mohini Devi, Sarala Devi, Hemaprava Majumder, Lady Abala Bose, Kamini Roy, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly, Misses B L Chowdhury, Romola Gupta, Lilabati, S J Herambo Chandra Maitra, Krishna Kumar Mitra, Mohesh Chandra Atarshi, Kazi Najrul Islam and his wife, Matilal Neheru, his daughter and Syed Hussain, Kumar Gopika Raman Roy, Robindranath Tagore, Ramananda Chatterji, Akram Khan, Abdul Rohim, Dr Bimal Chandra Ghosh, Acharya Sir Profulla Chandra Roy, Biren Sasmal, Jitendralal, Banerjee, Hemanto Sirkar, Protap Guha Roy, the late Bankim Chandra, Amritlal, Dwijendralal, etc Sarat Ch Chatterji, Dr Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta, the Mohanta of Tarakeswar and other renowned men of our society

Lest owing to the unapprenticed form of writing of this humble author any one would think that it has caused to defame him or her anywhere, if there be any, I offer my personal apology to everyone living and beg humbly pardon from the departed souls.

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At the Garden of Infancy.

The eighteenth of Ashar of the Bengali year 1307.—yes, I was born on that date. My father came from a respectable Brahmin family, his name and lineage, sad providence has barred me from mentioning. Still more, the members of that family are still living and moving about amidst the honour and pride of their neighbours; this tale of my shameful life, I presume, would one day reach them and I do not want to bespot their honour with the disclosure of my identity. Much remains unknown in this world. Let my parentage also remain so.

My grand-father was quite a well-to-do man having as many as four houses in Calcutta and a fine garden house in the suburb. He was a Government officer and had retired when my father was fit to substitute him in the family. My father who was an Advocate

and with my coming into the world came the prosperity of my father. Within a very short time my father was in a position to purchase a landed property yielding an income of almost ten thousand rupees a year.

I passed a very delicate infancy—my health being the constant anxiety of my mother. The grand old man—my grand father spent lots of money and energy for my health. Afterwards in my life I have often heard that the day when he was called away from this world of ours, his last gazes were gathered on me and as a sailor that sinks into the sea looking steadfast at the polestar above, he sank into the sea of oblivion, his eyeballs fixed on me. And to-day I firmly believe that it was that day that he breathed into me the flying life-breath that has saved me many a time from the sure clutches of death.

When I was three, I was once laid up with a heavy fever, so much so that all the eminent physicians of Calcutta almost gave up the hope of my recovery. All my senses were benumbed. The late Mahamahopadhyaya Dwarika Nath Sen took particular care and interest in my case. . .

But I was cured miraculously. My mother was a devout worshipper of Siva. One day

while offering Anjali to the God of Gods she suddenly fell unconscious. When again she came to her senses she murmured, as if in consolation to herself, "Khukumani will be cured and there is no more fear." Who knows what devine solace she received from her God, but strange to say, I began to improve considerably in health and that absolutely without any medicine. It took four complete months to recover.

Suddenly like the moon free from the snares of night-clouds, I began to gather radiance in and out my whole body. The angularities of my physique became round and full; my face beaming with beauty and lustre, the dark curling clustre of hairs waving in arrogance, the whole form beaming with joy and vivacity were really a source of wonder and joy to all my relations.

The sweet-meat and biscuit shops would often tempt me to run away to the streets and managing to snatch away some money from my mother I would often be at their counter. At home I became a little imp personifying noise, endless, ceaseless, and of course, meaningless. From dawn to sun-set my warblings resounded from every nook and turned the house into cauldron of noise. Later on, these pranks of

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infancy reproduced before me by my father often made me blush.

I was particularly very fond of bathing. At my mother's request, my father had constructed a very big reservoir of water with a beautiful fountain in its centre. There I learned to swim. I remember how with all my playmates I would jump into it, swim like a swan, why, like the queen of the swan ! O, the joy of it, that once it happened ! O, the pity of it, that it is no more !

In the evening, I was very fond of having sometimes a stroll, and sometimes a drive either with pappa or with Nandada, a cousin, born and bred up in our family. The open road, the endless procession of human being, the ceaseless symphony of diverse human voices attracted my infant soul. The glittering shops with all their fanciful designs and diversities were a feast for my eyes. I knew almost every haunt of Calcutta by that time from the Zoo to the Jain Temple.

Curious as it was, dolls seldom attracted me. I loved birds and it goes without saying that my father bought for me different varieties of them. But I had a positive dislike for cats and dogs. Even gardening never attracted me.

Gradually my passion for birds also dwindled away.

I was then only ten when to my utter bewilderment my mother died giving birth to a still-born child. Though a child, even then I knew what death was like and all the dupings of my relatives could not enlighten the great pang which I sustained in my innermost being. My heart burst loud in wild cries. They bedecked the dead body with floral wreaths, took the bier on their shoulder and as soon as they stepped out of the door, I ran wild after them crying for her who I knew would never any more respond to my call. Immediately I fell down, as if in swoon. Glancing helplessly towards the procession, all that I could see was the red red feet of my mother bismearred with *alta*.

Now as I am recording the tragic chronicles of my sad life, tears mingle with ink. Many a time in my life over the sad and gloomy hours tears have trickled down from my eyes, and I think all of them have flown to moisten the dried-up red of my mother's feet.

My mother's death came as a rude shock to my father. Three days he did not take any food. In my father's bed-chamber there was a big bromide enlargement of my mother's photo in

scipia colour which my father had made it done specially from England at a cost of seven hundred and fifty rupees. After the demise of my mother my father used to decorate it with fresh floral wreaths.

I was being admitted into the Bethune College when my mother was still living. When she died I was reading in the sixth class. A private tutor was also engaged to coach me and Nandada. After her death I was taken away from the school and a moveable tutor was engaged who could devote more time to me. Perhaps this step was taken by my father with a view to alleviate my sorrows. But the change did not impede the progress of my study.

Six months glided by. Bengal was then under the grip of the Swadeshi movement. The bomb-affairs engaged the attention of all. The exile of the nationalist heroes of those days, the daily arrests of revolutionaries, the execution of bomb-throwers, all went to create a great sensation all over the country. Many societies in many forms and gymnasiums were being established. My father was also in the vortex of this movement. Nandadada occasionally took me to those swadeshi meetings and I could well remember the feeling of warmth

reflected in a tiny child like me from the fire-glow of the orators of those meetings.

One thing I have omitted which I must mention here. I do not know how I developed the taste for music. My father did not know music. But from the very childhood I could sing almost perfectly with a unique sense of measure and proportion. Moreover I was blest with a sweet voice. So my father engaged a music teacher for me who gave me lessons on string instruments.

One day I saw Nandada with two daggers in his hand, which on enquiry, I learnt he has bought. Placing them before me on the table he said, "Mani, you must be taught to play daggers". Taking one of the implements in the hand, I enquired, "What good it would do to a girl?" "Why have'nt you heard the song," replied Nandada, "the song that says, "Take the sword in thine own hand, O mother dear, to save thine own honour?"

"Well, that I have heard" and without saying anything more I went over to my harmonium, opened the key-board and began to sing the famous song—

Take the sword in thine own hand, O mother dear, to save thine own honour.

Leave off those ornaments of gold, come in thy simple attire dyed with the hue of renunciation.

Millions though we are your sons,
We have forgotten to die for a cause,
There the brute moves about proud to offend thee,

Who would retaliate it but thee with the sword in thine own hand?"

That day I remember, my father took me to a swadeshi meeting which was being held under the presidentship of the late Surendra Nath Banerjee. I had to sing that very song in that meeting. Little I thought that I was inviting my doom through that song.

I am speaking of the time when all Burdwan with its adjoining villages were suffering horribly as the result of the Damoder flood. Many relief funds were being opened and countrymen generously contributed their mite to the relief of their distressed brothers. To make the fund weigh heavy theatres and cinemas opened benefit nights.

On this occasion I visited the cinemas and theatres for several times with my father. Nandadada also accompanied us. I remember that the theatre with its colours and lights

attracted my attention tremendously. The very first drama which I heard on the stage was "Devī Choudhurani" with the farce "Alibaba". I was so very impressed with the show that I had then and there caught the tune of the two famous songs, "Bina bajena keno?" "The string why is it so mute?" and "Chhi Chhi Etta Janjal". These two songs I was often to sing at the request of my father.

Gradually I developed a passion for the cinema and every Sunday saw us there. Often I accompanied my father. Occasionally on some Sundays my father would carry me to attend the Brahma Samaj. Though my father did not belong to the Brahma Samaj, yet in all his ideas he was as much a Brahmo as any member of the Samaj.

As I have said before my father used to decorate the photo of my mother with flowers and wreaths. But there came a time when for some reason or other, he stopped doing so. For a long time a withered wreath was hanging over the picture, and that also was removed by the servant when cleaning the dirt from off the walls. The event passed off silently without stirring our mind to any sensation.

Through the efforts of Nanda-dada I learnt

to play at daggers. The training has left a token in the form of a cut in my arm, which has not as yet vanished. At my father's persuasion I had to give up the practice and he tried to divert my attention to reading novels and books of stories. My tutor also helped me in culturing within me the passion for it.

I had by this time also seen Bankimchandra's "Bhramore" and "Kapal.Kundala" staged. One day Master-mahasaya,* as I then called my tutor, told me, "If you really want to appreciate Bankimchandra, you must be acquainted with the original". We had three almirahs loaded with books. Master-mahasaya took the trouble himself to discover the volumes of Bankimchandra from that heap. I almost drowned myself in Bankimchandra—night and day his immortal books were my constant companion.

The widow sister of my father often visited our house. Once I overheard her telling my father, "Well brother, you are so very learned in the Sastras—yet you are doing nothing to maintain the continuity for your family—thus

* The respectable form of naming the tutor in Bengali corresponding the English "Sir".

depriving the Pitri kuls₍₁₎ of their Jala-pinda₍₂₎” Little I understood the import of those words then

Afterwards my father again got me admitted into the Bethune College. This time I got permission to sit in the fifth class. As our car was not always available, I had to go to the school and come from it in the college conveyance.

As long as my mother lived I used to share the same bed with her. When she died my bed was removed to my father's chamber, where I slept in a separate coach. One day my father called me and said, “Khuku—you should hence sleep with your auntie”. I never disobeyed my father. Another day he called the servant and ordered him to remove the photo enlargement of my mother that was hanging in his bed-chamber to my study. My study also was arranged to a new order. Two big book cases with a large Mahogany table, were brought for decorating the room. The whole floor

(1) 'Pitrikul' means the forefathers of any family that have gone to heavens

(2) It means offering of water for the drink of the Pitrikuls. It is the custom enjoined upon us by our religion to offer annually water offering to our departed forefathers. Only a male issue in the direct line can offer so

was carpeted, my mother's picture was removed from my father's bed-chamber and was made to adorn the wall of my study with many other newly brought English landscape pictures.

Master-mahasaya was satisfied at the transformation. My days glided by in attending to my school-lessons, in reading novels, and passing the leisurly hours in visiting theatres and cinemas.

Suddenly one fine morning when the gentle breeze was blowing from the south, pregnant with the smell of spring, the sweet sound of the Nahabat was heard at our door. Friends and relatives came in number and the whole house was resonant with their merry laughers. I saw my father fresh in his bridal costumes. There awaited the throne bedecked with flowers to carry the groom. Evening came. With it came festive lights and colours. It attracted my infant soul. Suddenly as I entered my study my eyes fell on my mother's picture. Tears trickled down. Outside the conch-shell was announcing the departure of the procession. Silently I took shelter in my bed—none noticed me. I knew not when I fell asleep. When I awoke I saw my step-mother before me.

An Indian musical accompaniment used in almost all ceremonies of marriage and other festivals.

At the gate of youth.

Gradually the festive mirth came to an ebb. I also began to realise seriously the situation around me. Pishma was not required any more, so she soon left our place, giving proper instructions as regards all domestic affairs to the newly-come bride.

My step-mother was older than me by a single summer only. But being naturally of a very robust constitution, I looked much more advanced in age than her. She was a beautiful lady and knew something of the three R's. I had little occasion to meet her as all the time awhile I buried myself deep in my studies.

Whenever my father found any opportunity to come to the *Harem*, my step-mother managed to be there under some pretext or other. Except on urgency I seldom met my father. Formerly he used to enquire of my studies and school affairs, sat by me when I sang; but now all those have become memories only. My father often did take my step-mother to the theatre. He did never carry me with them. On such occasions I took Nandadada with me and visited the cinemas.

Suddenly, my old tutor was made to resign, the reason I failed to gather in my mind. After a few days a new tutor came and I heard my father say, "Well, you are now advanced in your studies; your old tutor was not up to it; moreover we require men who are in touch with the modern mode of teaching and hence the change".

It is necessary now that I should introduce my new tutor to my readers. The first day he came to our house, his attitude and his make-up positively attracted my attention. His long hair was brushed back—the curls resting on the shoulder—and by all his appearances he was only a smart and clean-shaven young man of twenty-two or three. The ordinary cloth was dressed up in a manner as to look like a loose pyjama like that of the Kabulis. He had two very beautiful eyes, half-hidden beyond the glass-walls of his spectacles. His complexion was fair and as regards his stature it would be said that he was a bit lean. But he had an exceptional sweet and soft voice like the soft tunes of a flute. He was almost a green graduate and was engaged as a school-master some where. And he was a bachelor.

My studies went on smoothly under his teaching. Mathematics he knew not well,

but history, literature, especially poetry he could coach very well. That year I got promoted from the fourth class to its immediate higher.

Nandada was only senior to me by two years. But unluckily he got plucked and had to remain in the second class for another year.

Only four or five days have passed, when my new Master-mahasaya, oneday called me and said, "Well, Manu, I do not like that you should call me, Master-mahasaya. It sounds odd. Why not call me by my name?"

"But the trouble is", I was quick and prompt in my reply, "that you do not like to be called as "Moshai" nor do I like to put "Babu" after any name."

My young tutor laughed out and said, "Well that matters little, you can call me as your Mukuldada. You know my name is Mukul Chandra Mukerjee."

Henceforth I began to call him by that name and our relation began to grow more and more intimate.

One day my father had occasion to call me and said, "Khuku, perhaps you know that your Master-mahasaya is in the habit of taking tea. If you could arrange for his tea here, I hope, he might come earlier."

We took tea twice daily. Formerly when the tea was ready, we drank it in company of my father. Now a days my step-mother took the cup in her own hand and my father had it served there in his own room. He never called me there, and I resisted myself from going there anymore. Silently in my own study in company of my mother still living in the picture I had to take my tea alone.

But happily I got Mukuldada as my tea companion. Over our cups we chatted politics, social problems, and anything that crossed our mind. Our leaders then were thinking of 'Atma-sakti', the problem of the power from within. Mukuldada said, "Manu, do you know what our *Shristialars* thought of pleasure and pain? Everything that is within one's power of control is pleasure, everything that is dependent on others is sorrow. Not to talk of the problems of economics, we are to depend on others even for the smallest necessity of our life. As you see, unless the servant prepares the tea, we can't get it. So very *chse* loving we have grown!"

The speech had its result. I had a small electric heater bought and connected it with the switch in my study. The next day when Mukuldada came I prepared the tea myself.

offered the cup with my own hand. This made him almost shout with joy, 'Just see, how ideas bear fruit when it is sown in the right field in the right manner.' I could not imagine then that this round ripe arm that was reflected in the tea-cup also had a firm grip in his heart.

The Pujā came. The doors of the High Court closed for the long vacation. My father took the opportunity to have a round about in the upper part of India with my step-mother. He took only two servants with him. I had a great longing to go with him. But as I understood that he had no intention of taking me with them, my wounded vanity did not prompt me to beg the invitation from him. They went away for the holiday leaving me alone sad and wounded. Pishima had come. Occasional letters came to her but I had not the fortune to receive a single letter from them.

One day Nandadada offered the invitation to take me to the theatre. He said, "Mani, let us go to the Minerva. "Shirī Farhad" is going to be staged there. A grand Opera! All music and dance." Pishima's permission was required. In granting the permission she added, "You see, both of you are kiddies, better take Master-mahasaya with you." Being invited to go with us, Master mahasaya had little to resent.

We had a box reserved for us. The play almost bewitched me. Sitting by me Mukuldada was explaining all the situations and characters of the book. The grand passion of Farhad and the unique self-surrender of Shiri moved my heart to its inner depth. Mysteriously enough, I was feeling within me, a queer sensation. As if the instinct that had been lying there asleep for ages was first waking in the light of a new Sun.

Master-mahasaya often accompanied us to the theatre and the cinema. Without him my joy was not perfect; just because it was he who explained to me the whole thing that we visualised before us. Pishima loved dramas with religious bearings. So whenever there was occasion for it she also accompanied us.

When my father was away on his holidaytrip, I suddenly fell ill. Night and day Mastermahasaya sat by my side and nursed me. From calling the doctor to the preparing of food for me, he did everything. When in pain my limbs ached, I felt his gentle touch over my limbs—his finger-tips soft and smooth often lulled me to sleep by their gentle caress. Gently he would put the grape to my lips—his finger touching my lips!

Often when in feverish anguish I cried recalling the sweet memories of my mother, I had seen him weeping silently for me. He knew how my mother loved me and how I have lost my father's affection. I recovered after a month. When still convalescent, I murmured feebly, 'Mukulda you have saved my life.' To which Mukulda replied, "Thank God, Manu, it is He who has saved you." I grasped his hand with all the grip of my nerves and my heart cried out, "Mukulda, how am I to repay this great affection?"

From that time, when we were alone, I used to call him by the more intimate pronoun "Tumi." I gradually felt that our hearts were attracting each other with a great velocity. One day when he came he offered a book in my hand and said, 'Manu, my "Jharna" ("The Fountain") has just been published. Only to commemorate the great day when I got the bliss of serving you, I have dedicated these, the first flowers of my heart, my poems in thy sweet name.' "I received the book but I blushed immensely as I stammered. "Well, Mukulda, you did not say anything about it before." He smiled and said, "Well, that is my only offence".

While teaching me English he had many poems done into Bengali verses for me. Many

poems were written in my study even. On print they took a new form and appealed to me in a quite different way.

After an extensive tour throughout the whole of upper India, my father returned after five months. Naturally he was two months absent from the Court excluding the vacation. He had little mind to continue the legal profession.

One day a distant brother of mine came to our house in search for a job. I did not remember that I had seen him before. But, the wonder of it all, he talked to me in a manner as if we were knowing each other quite intimately. "I see Manu," he said, "You have grown up to be a lady! Well! Well! In what class are you reading now? Somebody coaching you at home, eh?"

"I read in the second class. Mukul Babu is my private tutor," I simply replied.

"What?" he exclaimed in amazement, "Our Mukul, the poet of 'The Fountain?' Eh, he is my class friend, we read in the Scottish Church's". When at evening Mukulda came, he met his old friend and when old friends meet they have many things to chum over.

After some time Mukulda remarked, "Well, Manu, you did not tell me that you were related

to Ramesh Babu?" "I did not exactly know it" I had to reply, 'father introduced him to me,' Rameshdada took the opportunity to say, "Well, you see, when I came here last, it was ten years back. Manada was then only a child. I had then only got through my Entrance Examination. After that for some time the Swadeshi movement carried me away and I had to stop my studies for some time. Now, you see, I am just an M. A., an honourable member of the great community of the unemployed."

Through the efforts of my father Rameshda got a post at a monthly salary of two hundred rupees in a merchant office. After staying for a month with us, he removed to a boarding. While parting I heard him saying to father, "As soon I would be able to reserve some fund, I would bring down mother, wife and others here at Calcutta." I have forgotten to mention that Rameshda was married only a few months back.

Amidst the luxuries of our house, I would confess, I had everything that tended to material pleasure. Rich, good foods, costly garments, ornaments in number, servants waiting at the call; a luxurious bed, these and many others I had. But all these failed to appease the hunger of the soul. My father's negligence and loss of

affection added fuel to this fire burning in my heart. Seated comfortably in my motor when I saw the coolie-woman passing by with the child in her arm, all radiant with an inner glow, all these wealth and pleasure seemed like a curse to me. To be relieved of material discomfort is not to have affection—food and raiment cannot substitute love. Love has its origin in the innermost recesses of the heart. It does not offer anything. It only touches the soul with its magic wand and all the world is transformed to a new valuation.

On the eve of my thirteenth birth-day my father called me and said, "Khuku, do not forget to invite your Master-mahasaya and your Rameshda to celebrate your birth-day." Birth-day celebration no more appealed to me. Any way I had to go through it.

As gifts I got a gold necklace from my stepmother, a silver powder-case from Rameshda, and a Gitanjali of Rabindranath from Mukulda.

Now-a-days Rameshda also joined us to the theatre. Our theatres were then passing through a transformation. Owing to the efforts of some educated gentlemen, the dramatic art was taking a new form. Both Rameshda and Mukulda appreciated the revolutioning genius of the new artists and often praised them.

The Elopement.

While at Bethune College I came into intimate relationship with two or three girls amongst whom I must relate something of Kamala here, just because my life has been entwined with that of her. Now-a-days I do not meet my girlhood friends, many of whom I have completely forgotten by this time. But the memory of Kamala is still fresh in my heart. It may be that she also remembers me even now.

Kamala was really a beautiful girl and I think still she is so. It is a common adage in our country that twenty sees a woman old. But it is not true at least in some cases. There are women whom twice twenty summers have visited and gone by yet their beauty is as fresh as the autumnal moon-light, their body brimful of youth like the river in full tide. Perhaps you will laugh when you would hear that as a woman I fell in love with Kamala.

It was not her beauty only, her behaviours also captured my soul. Her love and sympathy I never lacked. In music, in sports or in wits she had an equal proficiency in every activity. No function, no festival could be managed without her assistance. She taught us music.

Once there was a variety entertainment in the University Institute in aid towards the building fund of a girl school. Rameshda was one of the enthusiasts. As far as I remember the students of the Girl-schools of Calcutta arranged to play selected scenes from Nabin Sen's *Kurukshetra* on that occasion. I appeared in the role of Sailaja, and Kamala took the role of Jaratkaru. I remember our acting impressed the audience. The two songs which I sang were composed by my Master-mahasaya and set to tune by Kamala. The agony of the desperate love of Sailaja towards Arjuna was the burden of those songs. I still remember them and sing and still my heart throbs in sweet ecstasy.

Kamala came from a Baidya family. She lived with her mother in a two-storied house at Baghbazar; her father often had to be out on business tour. She had a brother six years younger than her.

The house that they lived was owned by them, so with the two hundred rupees that his father received as salary they managed to keep on smoothly.

Many a time I had visited their house. Her mother was a very affectionate lady and every time that I was there she would feed me with

special dishes. Her affection drew me so near her that I felt that I had again found a mother. Often she would say, "Remember, Kamala is only your younger sister!"

Two years back. Through the efforts of a friend of her father living at Kashi, Kamala got married to a young man. Kamala was then reading in the third class. The bridegroom lived with his parents at Kashi and was employed there in some sort of business. When the vacation came, Kamala used to go to Kashi. I had the privilege to see all their love correspondences and over them how, I remember I spent hours and hours trying to measure the heart through the words.

These letters were the butt of ridicule amongst our school-mates. I had also other married friends. Intimacies of their married life were also known to me. We freely discussed all about love and marriage—the first love-notes, the night of all nights, the *Basara-Ratri*, the thousand and one wiles of love, the psychology of the husbands and so on. Amongst all these I culled my plot for writing short stories. Reading those stories Mukulda often said, "I smell realism through your lines."

Some eight or nine months thus passed away and sad to record that Kamala got separated

from her husband. The reason was quite astonishing. Her father-in-law had heard any way that her mother was not the married wife of his father—she remained as only his concubine. The old man of Kashi was not ready to accept the daughter of a prostitute as his daughter-in-law. He immediately declared that he was not going to accept her any more and that he would marry his son again. He also intimidated them that if they sue for maintenance charge he would disclose all the scandal in the open Court and bring counter-charge against them for deceiving him.

Over this event her husband wrote some sad and piteous letters to her. He really loved Kamala. In one letter he wrote, "What am I to do! I know you are unstained! But you I now I cannot go against my father's will. Excuse me, my Kamal. With the sanction of religion, I accepted you as my wife, and it is religion that has prompted me to leave you. Even Ramchandra could not accept Sita after the fire ordeal. Even He had to relinquish a wife like Sita. So adieu, my love for you will live for ever!"

I had the answer written for Kamala. She was so very depressed that she had no mind to reply. She tried to drown her sorrows in all

her self-sought activities, but I could well see into her heart which was all lacerated. Persuaded by me she wrote at last, "Let thy will remain firm. Let thy reverence for your father remain unshaken. You have not realised the full phase of the ideal that you have cited, you have forgotten the penance of Parasuram—the death of Visma on the arrow-bed, the wailing of Ramchandra. Just to get away with the axe that killed his mother at his father's instance Parusnam had to roam about the earth from one pilgrimage to another. The reverence for his father could not save him. Even Bhishma had to pay the penalty for the insult of the love of Amba. He had to meet with defeat before an harmaphrodite. The reverence for his father could not save him from his defeat. In this world every action bears its fruit separately and is not inter dependent.

One action cannot counteract the result of the other. It behoves not me just to advise you. Excuse my words, to-night. You are magnanimous, so you can say that you would love me eternally though leaving me to my fate for ever; but I am only an insignificant being. I am not as much magnanimous as you. So I am off with the current of life, I know not where it would lead me to."

Her husband had the mind to answer even this letter. He had written, "Kamal, I understand my crime. When the day of penance would come, please remember me wherever you may be. I would never lag behind to accept the penalty whatever it may be." The letter convinced me of the sincerity of her husband. He had really an affectionate heart but he was only a slave of circumstances. There are many such souls who do not receive their natural growth under the artificial pressure of society. Social laws, without developing the progress of life thus impedes its current in many cases.

I have never enquired into the validity of the scandal regarding her mother. The lotus has its origin in mud—the Sun never seeks to know it. The Sun is happy only to see her bloom under his rays—the wind comes and her heart moves—the bee comes and her heart is full of honey.

Kamala often visited our house. My father also loved her. Master-mahasaya, Rameshda, Kamala and I often drove together. Occasionally she would arrange a tea party in her house.

As I have said before, my father did not mind my mixing freely with anybody I chose to mix. He had a very liberal heart. We had an open space behind our house and I turned it into a tennis court. We began to play tennis in real earnest.

Harimati, a maid servant had escorted my step-mother to our house and till then was living there. She had absolutely no work but had to play the part of a personal assistant to my step mother. She was six and forty. Probably she was a widow as she put on *Than dhoti*, and did not use iron bangles in her hands and vermilion on the forehead. She had a piece of slender necklace round her neck and had four pieces of gold *chunis* on her hand. She used to fast on *Ekadashi* day but liked to use scented oil for hair and chew betel and tobacco leaves. Of course, she had an eye on the servants of the house.

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In a lonely quarter of the house, she had chosen a room for herself and used to put the room under lock and key whenever required. During the day, she would sleep in that room. As she had no fixed work to do, she was very frequently found to pretend expertness over others, and create unnecessary troubles.

She did not like my movements. At the outset she made complaints of it to my step mother but as we were almost of the same age and as she was wanting in natural gravity and controlling capacity like my mother she did not take the complaint seriously. Moreover, she was of a very weak disposition. Failing to do anything there, Harimati went to my father where she was equally disappointed.

At last she took up the matter in her own hand. One day she said to me 'Well Khukumoni, pray, tell me what are all these? The shame of it, they are all speaking of it. Be he your cousin or the tutor, you should be cautious in dealing with them—but the thing is you cannot walk with them without leaning over them! What are all these? You should know that you are not a young girl, but aged enough to be a mother."

Her allegations were not wholly unfounded and so I did not make any retort, only kept my head low all the while. I was not quarrelsome by nature and particularly in this case, my retort would not produce any good result. That the news had spread in the neighbourhood was only a threat to me, but I understood at the same time that Harimati would be the only instrument, to give the news to the wind.

My conclusions soon proved too true. When Harimati found it rather difficult to check me by mere words of threat, she fell to villifying me in the neighbourhood. My father soon came to know of it, but he refused to believe it. He gave a spirited reply to the informers. He said:—"Female emancipation in our country is always open to severe villifications—just because it is not in vogue."

But I was persistent. One day Mukulda had incidentally said "Obstacles in way of love only add to its zeal." This was too true in my case.

With the efflorescence of youth I saw before me two young worshippers—Mukul and Ramesh. Instinct drove me towards them. There was nothing, no anxiety, no love, no care behind to hold me back. Had my mother lived till then, probably I would not have been so degraded in life. Had my father cared for me for a single day or chastised me for my behaviour, my life would have taken a different turn.

Mukulda was naturally timid but Rameshda had the impressive boldness of youth. It was a holiday, father was reading in his study, Rameshda suddenly gushed in and asked, "Kakababu (uncle), where's Mani?"

"Why? She may be upstairs," replied my father. "We shall take a trip to the Botanical

garden today," said Rameshda, "and if Mani likes to accompany us, we shall take aunt too" "Well, go and ask her," was his reply.

Directly Rameshda came to my room, I lay half reclined on my sofa and was reading "Git Govinda" He sat by me on the sofa and asked, "Mani, to the Botany today? Up! Let's go"

'O, no, I feel unwell today,'

Instantly he felt my forehead and said, 'Well, its nothing, let me feel your pulse' He caught hold of my left hand, pressed it and said, "Its nothing, only you are making a joke" So he pressed his fingers against mine which made a thrill of pleasure pass through my body like an electric current

With a coquettish smile I said, 'What a doctor! But you should know that there are diseases which even your stethoscope cannot discover!' Rameshda realized what I meant and said "Let me then determine it without a stethoscope"—"O, no, dear, what's it?" I murmured indistinctly.

He left the room after a while I remained alone Only a slice of the noon day ray fell across my whole body as if to guard a thing which was no more

I grew convinced, if there is desire, chance never lacks.

Some six or seven months glided by. The flame of flesh that was ablaze that day regularly received its fuel. Romeshda was till then putting up in a Boarding House. He had innumerable pleas for keeping back his family at home. Mukulda was gradually becoming too fond of Kamala ; so much so that he had even proposed for a Brahma marriage with her. I was glad at this. But Kamala was still above this, as she had not been able to forget her husband so soon.

One day Romeshda proposed to me that it was not possible to continue here any longer. "Let us go to such a place" he said, "where you would always remain before mine eyes. Every moment my heart-beat would resound in your breast. When the mountain barrier has once broken, let the current flow into the wide, wide world." I had nothing to reply. I only clung to his breast and began to weep.

Our annual Examination was drawing nigh. I had to read for a longer period at home. One day I told my father that the school car comes

to take me at 9 50 A.M. but the class actually sits at 10 30. Plenty of time is thus wasted.

To which father replied 'Well, the family-car is under repairs, you and Nanda can have taxis if you so like' From the next day we used to go to our schools in taxis. After reaching me he took the taxi with him to his school and on way back he came and took me in the taxi from my school. Such was the arrangement.

For two or three days I was feeling a vomiting tendency and my mouth was constantly watering. The report made Romeś-dā quite dumbfounded. Next day when he came, he said, "Mani, I have taken four months' leave. Let us fly to the upcountry. We should not delay. Tomorrow when going to school, get Nanda to his school first and you drive to mine alone, I shall keep every thing ready. Mukul has been asked to purchase the necessaries." My heart leapt up with joy.

Mukulda used to come to teach me regularly. Our love affairs were not unknown to him. It prompted him to write several poems which he compiled into a book named "Madhuri".

Next day as usual, I and Nandada started for the school. I took no book with me and said to Nanda in way of explanation "We have hardly any need of books now, as we are getting now only revision lessons". Suddenly glancing over his wrist-watch Nandada exclaimed "Oh, I am almost too late to-day". I took the opportunity to say "Well, in that case, Nandada, you get down first, there's no harm if I am a bit late". Opportunities present themselves in such an unexpected manner. I was seriously thinking as to how I would get rid of Nandada. The great fund that supplies inspiration of noble works to great souls also supplies with equal generosity the ways and means by which a villian is a villian.

I left Nandada at his school and drove direct to Rameshda and found that Mukulda was waiting there. Rameshda was quite prompt and immediately got up on another taxi with me. I took leave of Mukulda. Kamala was kept in the dark so long. I requested Mukulda to disclose everything to Kamala. Our taxi proceeded towards the Howrah Station. I looked behind and saw that Mukulda was wiping his tears with a handkerchief.

Before I left home, I had a thought of bowing to my mother's picture but I had, on acco-

unt of my deep anxieties, quite forgotten it. On the taxi it seemed for the best, because a glance at my mother's picture, would have taken away the sense of adventure from my heart.

We travelled up to Burdwan on a local train and stayed there for a few hours and then started for Lahore in the evening by the Lahore Express.

The Illusion

Why I eloped ? Well, I am going to answer it frankly. Blinded by passion I left the shelter of my family. There comes a time strictly in accordance with the laws that regulate the body, when youth demands its food. Society has prescribed marriage exactly at that age in order to control the passionate out-growth. If there is good education and a healthy environment, there is little chance for this unsteadiness of mind in tender age. But to speak the precise truth, our society fails to secure this good education and healthy environment for our boys and girls. The result is that sex-appetite rises high in tender hearts at quite an early age.

As for myself I never had the advantage of any good education or of any healthy companionship. As a result of my education at school, I had learnt only to read light literatures and those had only roused my evil propensities. I had never read good books nor did anybody help me in doing so. The little pleasures that I enjoyed were of a low nature. The theatre-hall-musics and Cinema-pictures never aroused pious desires in me. It is dangerous for youngsters to try, to derive any good lessons from

these. As meat is dangerous for the child who is only teething, so are novels, these theatres and cinemas to young minds that are only budding. This experience I have gained at the cost of my womanhood and those who share the same fate with me will bear testimony to the correctness of my statement.

When a mere student of the second class, I was vain enough to believe that I knew much. I had read a sufficient number of stories and fictions by our young authors. More-over I had read Shelly, Byron, Shakespeare, Bidyapati, Bharatchandra, Iswar Gupta, Bankim, Dinabandhu, Girish Chandra, Rabindra Nath through the zeal of my tutor. It was, therefore, no wonder that a little girl like me should be puffed up a little.

Those who only roam in the realm of vision can acquire little knowledge about the hard realities of life. Our poets and literateurs belong to that group of visionaries. They only play with their own imaginations placed comfortably far away from the crude realities of every-day life. The world that I have seen so long in the pages of the novels and the books that I had read, melted away before me as soon as I came in direct touch with it.

I was only fifteen when I left home. Had I only known that I was as foolish and helpless as I was young, the world outside is not the world which I had imagined it to be, if fool-hardiness did not replace the virgin fearfulness, I could not have come out of my home. But vanity made me blind. It now occurs in my mind that if I had been under strict guardianship, it would have been better for me. I have now realised that some sort of subservience even in emancipation is absolutely unavoidable.

First of all, I thought all obstacles would readily vanish away with my leaving home—I would be able to drink the cup of passion to the dregs. But I was soon disillusioned; when at Delhi I was given to understand that the police were after us and we were to be under a veil. A renegade from domestic shelter and in a place where nobody was known, we were quite unable to decide as to what we should do towards our maintenance. I could not even think as to how I would stay alone when Rameshda would be out. Thousand and one problems suddenly appeared before our path which we took to be smooth. Money no doubt can solve all problems. But where to have it? As for myself I had come almost without a cowrie. Rameshda had an amount of only two

thousands and a half with him. How long would it last? It was necessary that we should live in a high style. Besides, I required some costly clothings and ornaments. A boy servant was also required. We had not come out of home only to live a life of a Sannyasi under the shade of a tree. Our life was to be a perpetual feast of passion and money was the only means to have the feast ready.

We spent two weeks at Delhi. I learnt from Mukulda's letter, that father had searched for me but had not lodged any complaint with the police. Suspicion had fallen on Rameshda. Kamala was very sorry on my account.

We left for Lahore. I never questioned within me the possibility of Rameshda's getting four months leave, the whole period of his service being only a year.

Dramas and novels do not teach us the laws under which clerks are granted leave. I took it to be that they can have it, if they would ask for it.

We travelled all the way in second class. At Burdwan Rameshda opened the suit-case and placing five packets of currency notes before me, said, "Well Manu, this is all that we have." I counted them and found the sum to be only two

thousands and a half. Where the money could come from I never questioned within me. His whole salary of one year even did not amount to that. Rameshda was not even happy in having a rich father. For want of fund he had to take his meals in our house.

But all these were far away from my mind. Satan or the creator of lust has the evil genius of beguiling all considerations to sleep. Our body had then taken wings and like a pair of nymph we were floating away amidst an atmosphere of unearthly dreams and sensations.

From Lahore we came to Amritsar. After staying there for three days we started for Kashmir. For about a month we stayed at Srinagar. The ever glorious nature of Srinagar tinged our heart brimful of love with a fresh touch of colour.

By the time we reached Bombay, I have ceased to be nervous. All the possibilities of fear that early cast a shadow over our love now vanished away. I had ample faith in the world-wiseness of Rameshda, so I thought I had nothing to fear from the police. Though we had come to learn from Mukulda's letters that father had not informed the police; still whenever we were in a new place Rameseda would first of all try to make friends with the Police-officer, his

idea being to be on safe-guard in case of any warrant being issued.

When at hotels, we lived up to the European style. I dressed myself like a Parsi lady and freely talked with everybody. Soon I managed to train myself in all the etiquettes. At first I bungled a lot. Rameshda noticed it and said, "Well, Manu, if you Bengali girls feel quite at sea at Punjab—if the Bombay-wallas be at their wits end to manage their dish when at Bengal, if Madras thinks Oudh to be a foreign land, where in lies the possibility of a compact Indian Nationalism?"

"India" I replied "is a vast country—almost a continent. The difference and diversities of language, religion and social customs are so very prominent that it seems impossible that India could ever unite under the banner of one nationalism."

While roaming over the important cities of upper India I had the good fortune to visit all the places sacred in our religion and history. This pilgrimage had its effect on my perverted imagination. Fickleness gave way to quietude. There came a sense of relief in my heart.

While on our way to Bombay from Srinagar we broke journey at Dwaraka and at several

other places of Rajputna. Pushkar, Bharatpur, Joypure and Chitore raised my mind to a noble elevation. I forgot everything about my father and the family from which I had fled away. Once I eagerly sought to visit these places but my father refused to take me with them at the instance of my step-mother. Thanks to Rameshda, the desire was thoroughly satisfied. While walking I had always his hand in mine, while in motor my arms were always round his neck. As our motor passed the rugged ways of upper India, the spring-coaches tossed us delightfully. Not only love, I felt a deep gratitude towards Rameshda.

At Haldighat Rameshda said, "This is the Thermopycl of India. Fifteen thousands of Rajputs died here for their country, The valour of those days is now a myth to us".

I had seen D. L. Roy's Protap Singha staged. So I immediately rejoined him,—"Such fatal a vow, such lofty a renunciation, such glorious a sacrifice for one's own country is a rarity in human chronicle. Such a noble aspiration is even beyond our imagination".

I visited the place where the great Padmini entered the fire. I saw pilgrims bowing down their heads and my head was naturally bent

down. My heart was throbbing and I was trembling all over. Quickly we left the place.

I know not what blessings she offered on my head, the Great Sati sitting in her throne at heavens, but I know that if India had not the ideal of a Sati like Padmini, then humanity would have lost one of its guiding stars. In our Purans, we have heard of a Sati entering the fire in the Yagna of Daksha, here we see a Sati entering the fire with all the halo of sacrifice round her divine frame. The flickering flames did not touch the body of Padmini, it only turned to ashes the lust of the unholy.

One day we were strolling over the pleasure walks of the Malabar hills. We had left our taxi behind and were walking in slow paces. I was in a very sad mood. All the noon I had spent in sleep. Rameshda was engaged in reading newspapers. Noon passed off silently. Rameshda had noticed the change and took me out for a stroll. Amidst the blissful surroundings of nature I revived a little.

"Well Manu," said Rameshda, is it to see your face dark and gloomy, that we have come out of the shelter of our family? What ails thee, my darling".

Silently I placed my head against his bosom. Tears overlapped my eyelids. He raised my face

and in the twilight saw my eyes dim with tears. Silently he wiped off the tears with his handkerchief. The strong odour of scent filled the twilight with sad memories.

Caressingly he said, "Manu, it is for you I have left everything behind. Mine own wife, my widow mother, little brothers and sisters,—all I have forsaken only for you. But would you leave me alone like this ?

Not a sound was to be heard anywhere, except now and then a stray car broke the hilly silence at long intervals.

"Silent as yet ?" scolded Rameshda, "what ails thee, darling ?"

"Nothing serious," I responded, "Haven't you seen what Kamala has written in her last letter ?" With this I stretched my right hand and pressed it round his neck.

"Oh, I see", said he, as he lighted his cigarette, "Homesick ! just like a little kid—is'nt it ?"

After a little pause he went on saying, "Permit me to be a little frank to-night, Manu ! Well, may I ask, what is there for attraction in your home ? Mother you have lost early, brothers and sisters you have none. Of course there is your father—but what a father—passing his days

smooth with his sweet sixteen—never for a moment prising to think that his daughter might require a little of his attention. A father who knew how to avoid his daughter! Even he did not forget to remove your mother's picture from his sight! Say, what attractions may you have there?

Had these words were repeated now, I think I could answer them properly. But then I only replied 'Excuse my mood, Rameshda! Away from the bondage of home I feel just like a weary traveller from the desert who has suddenly met a fountain of clear water. I need not know what you have left behind for my sake. My heart is full with what I see before me—the great feast of love that you have arranged for me.'

Thus passed away the little cloud that had gathered above our head. Immediately we hired a taxi and drove off to the cinema. I regained my mood. When the sweet cup of life is put before the lips, who is there the fool not to drink it off?

Kamala's last letter had brought the tidings that she had met my father and that the event had completely upset him. Even my step mother did weep for me. Only Harimati was too glad to see her prophesy thus fulfilled. She

had taken the holy task to preach the news all around. Nanda-dada had left school and as the letter said, he had taken a solemn vow to find me out. As regards the marriage of Kamala with Mukulda, her mother had assented to it.

The letter really touched my soul. My step-mother was really a good woman. She loved me but her love was shy. Like other clever women she knew not the art of winning one's heart. Her love to my father thus knew no formalities. I really grew sad in remembering her. And one more soul, whose remembrance made my heart ache—was Nandadada. It was his own inadvertence that helped me to make good the escape. Perhaps for that he had been severely taken to task by my father. His affection towards me had prompted him to search me out. Even I thought to surrender myself, just to maintain the honour of such a brave and noble soul. /

From Bombay we reached Madras via Nagpur. After staying there for some time we came up to Vizagapattam and thence to Waltair. The sea-side was so refreshing to my soul that we stayed there for two months. Then towards Kashi via Puri. Kashi has got a decent proportion of Bengali people. A few steps forward and

you are sure to meet a Bengali face by your side. This made me again nervous as I always feared that someday I might meet some one of our relatives. So I implored Rameshda to leave Kashi.

Reclining at ease over the arms of his easy chair Rameshda nodded and said, "I am not a woman to think like that. Perhaps it would be a surprise to you to learn that almost all the Bengalees that have gathered here belong to my class. May be some one has managed to seduce some others' wife and has taken shelter here at Kashi; some widow you might see who has only come here to get rid of the illegitimate child—some one you meet here who is otherwise a good lady but secretly commences over the body of her dearest relations. Kashi, Nawadwip and Brindaban, these three holy places are the resort of the unholies amongst us. So, in a place like this whom to fear? Who even has the courage to question his mate? Everybody here lives in dread of his neighbour. Remember the story of the woman and Jesus of the Bible. Pelted and stormed, the fallen woman sought shelter with Jesus who came out before the angry mob ready to stone her to death and said, "He that is without sin amongst you, let him throw the first stone!" And you know how the mob had to recoil.

I listened with wrapt attention to what he said only to say, "Sorry, I am not going to see Kashi through your spectacles. You have judged Kashi, Nawadwip and Brindaban according to your moral standard. There are unhappy beings who are not accustomed to see the other side of the picture and sorry to say you belong to that group. Whatever that may be, we need not stay here any more".

We speeded towards Mathura via Allahabad and Agra. At Prayaga I bathed in the holy waters of the confluence. Tajmahal, the Fort of Agra and the tomb of Akbar at Secendrabad took five days more. After roaming about for four or five months, at last we entered Mathura at the beginning of the month of Ashara. Rameshda wished to stay there for a pretty good time. I could not then understand why he preferred Mathura to all other cities.

As chance would have it, we got on hire a good house just on the side of Jamuna near Swamighat.

Of course there was a hotel near Cantonment run on European style but as fund would not permit it, we had to give up the idea of living in a high style. Rameshda thought it advantageous to live like a Bengali at Mathura. So he pulled down his hat and again

dressed like a Bengali. I had only to change the high-heel shoe for a Nagra. We engaged a cook and a servant who did all the out-door work for us. Suddenly one day, Rameshda returned home with his moustaches cleanly shaven off.

"Without it you do not look well," I murmured.

"It matters little. It would soon grow".

The issue was drowned in jests; but the matter did not stop there. One day Rameshda called a barber in and had his head cleanly shaven with only a tuft of hair in the middle. This made me suspect some sort of intention. After that he decorated his forehead and nose-tip with sandal paste, wore the cloth like the Madrasis and took the appearance of a Madrasi Pandit. Then I understood that he was only trying to hide his identity and I accepted the whole performance in jest.

While at Rangoon, Rameshda had managed to speak the Telugu tongue. I was almost surprised when I saw him conversing with the Swamiji of the temple of Rangaji of Brindaban. Rameshda had even changed his name and curious enough he used to have letters addressed as Ramaswarup Ayer.

While at Calcutta Rameshda had acquired the habit of drinking; but I did not know it

then. While we were living at different European hotels, I noticed him taking regularly to drinks. He even entreated me to take it in little doses. But I had to reject it saying, "Well, at this stage of my health I cannot take such things." But Rameshda was obdurate and said, "Oh, it is a good way off—another six months—you cannot postpone your enjoyment in anticipation of that date. Moreover you know what you take as Vinum Galicia is nothing but raw Ex No. 1." Rameshda used to take two pegs everyday and occasionally as thing would have it I had to pour it out to his glass.

Europe was then in the grip of the great War. Some batches of regiment were then staying at the Cantonment. One day Rameshda said, Well, you see Manu, let me try the Cantonment once for a bottle of wine. This hell of a place has got no wine—only "Sidhi and Bhang". So he went out. I remained alone as I had to do whenever he went out.

The servant brought in a letter. It was written by Kamala as the handwriting would show it. I opened the letter, read it and when I had finished it the whole earth began to tremble beneath my feet. Kamala has informed that Rameshda had stolen three thousand rupees

from his office cash. The whole affair of taking leave from his office was bogus. The company had a warrant issued against him for his immediate arrest. Though my father did not inform the police about our elopement, my uncle (Nanda's father) took the thing seriously and had informed the police. The police had made a sweeping search of all the places with which we were connected and as ill luck would have it, they have got hold of our Bombay and Kashi addresses from Kamala's house. Detectives were fast tracing our footsteps.

My whole body trembled in fear and with every passing moment there arose in me a deep and serious tone of supreme hatred for the man with whom I had thus run away from the shelter of my home. My only crime was that I was sincere and believed in whatever he had said and what a reward for that ! I had loved with all the depth of my soul only to be cheated like this ! I remained almost petrified.

Evening saw Rameshda returning home dead drunk. I burst out in anger, "Rameshda—what about your office ? You were granted a leave of four months and but it has expired long since—"

Without giving me the opportunity to finish my sentence, he stammered, "What ! am I to

offer explanations to you ! Why ! are you my master ?

"Explanation I do not require—but reasons I demand."

"Well, Manu, you should know that I have applied for extension. Perhaps this would dispel your doubt, if you have any."

"It is not doubt only. You know the money we had, has been all spent out. You can once run down to Calcutta and have your leave-pay, which I hope would not be less than some eight hundred rupees."

"Well, that does not concern you. Have my match-box and cigarette !"

I obeyed and then implored, "You see Rameshda, how frail I have become physically; I long to be in a city where there is a good maternity home and that would require a good deal of money."

Before he could answer me, he staggered into his bed and lay like a log, uttering, "Manu, never be sorry for want of money. You have seen how I had brought rupees two thousand and a half in a single stroke—"

With a firm voice, I said, "It is not two thousand and a half, it is three thousand net."

Suddenly his eyes were opened. He rose straight and looked into my face.

"Rameshda, I know everything. I know how you have earned those three thousand and now I let you know that hence forward I am not going to benefit by a single coin earned in the manner which you prefer most. If you are worth it, you must earn your living honestly and I can remain with you then and then only. Otherwise I beseech you, do not drag yourself down to hell and thus take me along with you there!"

"What" he replied, "you, to call me a thief? For whom have I forsaken everything that was dearest to me? For whom now I am a thief—a run-away from the laws? Oh! Such is the world! Love goes here unrecognised and unreturned! Well, you remain with your holies and let the unholy live his own life."

Thus saying he took his shirt, put on his shoes and to my bewilderment he actually staggered out. What, is he really going to leave me?

I ran and fell at his feet crying as a woman's soul can cry, "Rameshda, don't leave me like this—excuse me if I am wrong—but don't leave me like this."

The reply came, first in the form of a kick and then in a loud shout.—“Silence, you bitch ! Remain with your holiness.” But he had not the power to move any more. Soaked with wine as he was, he fell to the ground. I dragged him to the bed and nursed him to sleep. That night I had not a wink of sleep. All night I sat by his side fanning him to sleep.

At nine in the next morning he came to his senses. He read Kamala's letter through and through

As I looked into his face in the clear rays of the morning sun I began to know him in another light. Suspicions arose where faith ruled. I saw before me a thief, debauch and drunkard.

The Way that leads to—

As a sequel to that event our love was lost amidst insignificant quarrels. We had not a single coin left to us and we were forced to ask for it from Mukulda who of course managed to send fifty rupees with great difficulty. Twenty-eight out of that fifty went directly into the counter of the wine-merchant. Misfortune seldom comes alone. The cook had also left us being convinced he would not get his pay if he stayed even. So I had to cook myself, which I never had to do before. The heat and the forced unskilfulness made my weak body and mind bent like a reed.

I advised him to seek some sort of a job at Mathura. I had a costly winter-suit, which was at last sold out. Gradually one by one all my ornaments began to vanish. The necklace which I received as my birth-day offering from my stepmother was purposely kept hidden from him. When he came to know of it, he mercilessly kicked and belabored me. These things were going to be my daily gifts from my lover. I wept only.

One day he entreated me to ask some money from Kamala, which I could not do on any

account knowing full well that they were not rich enough to help us. This made him more furious and I had to write for it to Kamala. Most graciously she did send twenty rupees, but that also was spent out soon.

Rameshda knew that the gold necklace was with me. He tried again to have it but I stubbornly refused. One day he said, "Well Manu, a piece of good news. I have got a professorship at the Prem-Mohabidyalaya of Brindaban. I have got myself acquainted with Raja Mahendra Pratap, an avowed British-hater and you know I too belong to that category." He was much pleased to talk to me. To begin with I shall get a salary of one hundred rupees only".

Really the news gladdened my soul. Rameshda paused for some moments, as if brooding over a problem and then said. "But you see, the trouble is, I have got to get a suit." And I lost no time in saying, "Well, there is my necklace, you can pawn it for the necessary sum and recover it when you get the salary." Rameshda showed reluctance. "Well, how can that be, it is a birthday offering!" he said, I could easily understand the sting of reproach and wounded vanity underlying his words.

I opened my little suit-case and flung it against him.

Days went by, and I was surprised to see that Rameshda did not bring the necessary clothes. Suddenly it dawned upon me that the whole talk of getting this job was only a clever trick. One day I actually asked, "Well when will you join the college?"

With all the shrewdness he could command he replied, "Raja Mahendra Pratap has suddenly left Brindaban. The Government has issued a warrant against him. So you see, how I have been put to troubles!"

Lest I doubt the fact, he had managed to bring "The Hindu" and showed me the news.

Mathura and Brindaban were then celebrating the Jhulan festival. I entreated him to take me to the temple of Dwarakadisha. He refused it on the pretext of ill-health and advised to take Lachman, our servant with me. So I did and he remained alone at home.

During the occasion all the temples of Mathura take a festive atmosphere. The temple of Dwarakadisha heads all the other in festive mood. Seated on a throne studded with gold and silver the Lord of the Festival enjoys the swing. Light, colours and flowers turn the

temple into a heavenly abode. The sweet note of "Bhajan" surcharges the air with divine fervour. Amidst this unethereal surroundings the devotee forgets the little sorrows of this world of flesh and blood.

We returned home at nine in the night. I was surprised not to see Rameshda. The light was burning in the room and in its light I discovered a letter on my bed! Instantly I took it up and it was addressed to me thus,—

"Manu, it is impossible to live with you any more. You take me to be a veritable debauch and you hate me as a liar and drunkard. Love cannot remain where there is doubt and hatred. If I can repay the three thousand rupees, I know I would be excused and the libel of theft would be withdrawn—if I abscond with ten more girls like you, rest assured, I would be able to move amidst all that surrounds us with my head erect—and as regards drinking—well, you should know that it is the sign of aristocracy. Foolish as you are, let you remain with your false sense of morality. You must know that no amount of moral awakening would be able to save you. Adieu! Do not try to seek me out. You should at once leave this house as the police is hard upon my trial."

Suddenly I felt that a huge load was taken off my shoulder. Drowned as I was I suddenly felt the little breath of air as if raising my head above the drowning waters. Rameshda was to me like an unbearable load and with his sudden disappearance, I felt instantly the supreme sensation of being the master of myself.

I had no nerve to cook my food. When the night grew deeper and deeper fresh fears like dreadful hobgoblins began to appear before my mind. Where to go and what to do ! I tried to collect all the moral force within me. The night passed without a wink of sleep. Early morning I called my servant and said, "Hire a tonga for me ; I would go to Brindaban. "

I had only two "churis" in my arm and an earring. I sold them and paid out the salary of the servant. With the remaining money I left for Brindaban. While leaving I received a letter from Kamala. She had written that it was a blunder on my part to abscond with Rameshda. Such passions as we had, come and go in no time. We could have managed to be married even, if we thought it necessary. Lastly she had instructed me to correct the blunder, even then

But her instructions did not appeal to me. I went to Brindaban and hired a little cottage

near the Shevakunja. Near about lived many Bengali widows who were all quite advanced in age. I explained my situation to them that while at Mathura I lost my husband and mother-in-law. I had written to my relations and I was waiting for the reply. Needless to be said I got their sympathy. .

After a month I removed to Keshighat. The little money I had, was spent out by this time. In between I had an attack of fever which led me up in bed for ten days. If one could beg one need not go without food at Brindaban. But I was so weak that I could not even move.

Two days passed without food. Begging I knew not. Completely surrendering myself to fate I lay by the open road near Bausibata. Inwardly I was sincerely praying for death. A Bengali gentleman who was passing by kindly picked me up and took me with him.

The gentleman was the pupil of a Sadhu Mahanta. I was taken to his Asharam. Mahantaji himself was a Bengali, aged about 65. Seeing me he exclaimed, "Why have you brought her here ? She is pregnant. I see some wicked people must have brought her out and have left her in this plight. Woe unto her ! Give her some food."

After taking some food, I felt a little comfortable. Mahantaji most compassionately addressed me and said, 'Well, mother, it is not the custom of this Ashram to take any woman as its inmate. Moreover—you are pregnant. What are you to do ?'

I burst into helpless tears and fell to his feet crying, 'Father, a sinner as I am, you must save me. You can read my life and know everything of my sad fate.'

"Yes, I know it all", he said, "I know more things of you than you can know of yourself. But this repentance of yours is also transitory and insincere. Once passion takes root in the mind it is very hard to pull it out. Accidental calamities, diseases and misfortunes often stop for the time being the growth of this weed, but whenever favourable atmosphere returns it again bursts out in thousand ramifications. Only the sincere love of God can eradicate the evil of this passion and that requires severe penance."

"Pardon me," I replied with choked voice "and give me a shelter."

Affectionately he replied, "Mother, food and shelter you would receive much. It is not rare in this world. What you suffer from is no poverty—but the attack of beastly passion.

You do not seek shelter from that attack of passion—what you want is food and shelter. Well, will you return home?"

I nodded in the affirmative and gave him my father's address. He then called his pupil and said, "Write a letter to Calcutta to the said address. Ramkissen lives with his wife and children in the garden by the Ashram. See that she can live with them for the time being."

After the disciple was gone he called me and said, "I don't think that your father would take you back. He has got to live according to social laws which do not permit your acceptance without due penance. To succumb to temptations is a spiritual disease. Without due penance which can only restore the purity of mind, our soul can never turn towards God."

I began to live in the garden with the family of Ramkissen. He was in charge of the garden. My daily duty consisted in cleansing the cow-shed, feeding the three cows along with their calves, drawing at least ten to twelve buckets of water from the well, washing the place where the *Sadhus* took their meals and grinding my own wheat for my meal. I was glad to perform all these but I had to labour very hard. At the behest of Mohantaji my hairs were cropped close. Only once during the early

hours of morning I was premitted to visit the temple in a day. Whenever Mohantaji came to the garden he used to converse with me.

After a month my father's reply came from Calcutta. As anticipated he had written to Mohantaji that he would not be able to accept me. He thought such a daughter to be dead and gone. I had not intelligence to argue then, moreover my whole body and mind was then in a miserable condition. But I think I can now reply my father's refusal. Just a year back before writing this autobiography I had to visit Brindaban once and there I met the Mohantaji still living—details of which I would narrate later on. On that occasion I said to him, "Well father, I am a great sinner. I am to live outside the pale of society. My father forsook me. But there are the men who are paying all their wealth, honour and purity in homage to these feet of a great sinner like me—still they are honoured as poets and literatores—still they are famous as politicians and patriots—still they are at the top of the society as men of rank and wealth. Still more there are our religious leaders, those Mohantajis against whom our society does not utter a single word of censor. These people are at the top of the council, the corporation, the

court, the family and the society. While on the otherhand we are to suffer this life-long banishment in hell, degraded and dishonoured eternally for the one indiscretion of a moment in a remote girlhood-day, such is social justice!"

Now to resume the narrative. Three months thus passed away. One day while Mohantaji visited the garden Ramkissen said to him, "Well father I fear that so much hard labour would be harmful for the child that is in her womb." I was nearby and heard it all. Mohantaji replied "Well, the child is long dead. The problem is now to have a safe delivery and that requires some amount of trouble." Ramkissen was a bit surprised.

"The girl has caught an ugly disease" remarked Mohantaji, "Passion often makes a man forget even the elementary physical laws,"

In due time I gave birth to a still-born child. Ramkissen's wife took all the care that was necessary for the time and in such a manner that I should always remember the kindness of that simple-hearted illiterate peasant woman. Few months back, as I have said before, while we again visited Brindaban we searched for her and sad to say we came to learn that she had died only seven or eight months back,

After the delivery I became a victim to various kinds of ailments I could not take any food Every evening I felt feverish Soon I was bed laden After a prolonged illness during which Mohantaji took particular care of me, I came round a little. One day as the night was dawning outside and I was terribly suffering from head ache, I forgot the surroundings and methought that I was just in my bed at our house in Calcutta My mother was sitting by me and was gently feeling my forehead In stupor I exclaimed, "Well, Ma, I will also go to the theatre with you" Mother replied, "No, darling, don't be naughty, you are still a child " Then suddenly some one came and called my mother away. Seeing that I cried aloud, 'Mama, take me along with you—take me too—'

Ramkissen's wife was lying in the next room Perhaps she had heard me shrieking and ran to my room I was still then crying aloud, "Mother, take me with you "

I reported of the dream to Mohantaji who heard it all and said, "Well, I see, you are to undergo a still more lengthy period of suffering "

I begged to be initiated into the holy life. he refused it saying, "Well, mother, I can

not transcend the laws of destiny. The time has not yet come when you require to be initiated into the holy order."

Another six months glided by. I had almost come round and now I could attend to my regular duties. Some of the disciples used to come regularly to the garden to take the necessary vegetables for Mohantaji.

I acquired intimacy with one of them and while I was engaged talking to him somewhat suspiciously, I knew not that we were detected by Mohantaji himself secretly. I must confess it to mine own fault and weakness, the disciple was really of a pure character. From that day his visits to the garden were stopped.

One day I wrote a long love letter and with it I secretly stepped into the *Ashram* at noontide. I selected the time, because I knew that at that period of the day Mohantaji was used to remain in his room in contemplation. While I was waiting for him under a tree within the compound, suddenly I saw Mohantaji himself coming towards me. I was completely perplexed when he came near me and asked, "How is it that you are standing here and at this time?" I stammered and said, 'Methought the calf has run into the compound—so.'—Before I could finish the sentence, he lifted his finger and pointing it

towards the gate, said, "Out, from the *Ashram*, you know the calf has not come here. If it at all come, it is not your duty to look after it. Ramkissen is for it. Out immediately—"

The very next day Mohantaji called me. An elderly gentleman was sitting by him. Tremblingly I approached him and heard him saying, "You are to leave this place to-day to Calcutta with this gentleman, who would arrange for your living there." I was only glad to hear of it.

In his former days Mohantaji was a high official and in that connection many friends came to see him and to enjoy his conversations. The gentleman with whom I came down to Calcutta was also a friend of Mohantaji. Coming down to Calcutta I stayed for ten days at his house.

In some out-skirts of the city SjDas had established a Refuge. Sj.....Das was a lawyer and had established reputation as a national worker. The gentleman with whom I came to Calcutta was also known to Sj. Das and he took me to the Refuge.

With this ends an episode of my life. The negligence of my father, ill-breeding and unhealthy companionship were mainly responsible for my downfall. I was never trained

to restrain my passions and emotions. I was left to myself to feed mine own passions and instincts without any check. The novels and the stories that I read only helped to rouse the passion of revolt against the established social orders and passion never stops to reason.

Amongst the ill-fated fallen women who leave the shelter of society tempted by the illegal love of men everyone meets the same doom. The seducer leaves the girl as soon as he is satiated and the innocent girl is left to her inevitable destiny. Amongst the fallen sisters there is not even a single woman that can continue living with her first lover or seducer. Experience would bear solemn testimony to my affirmation.

Such loves are the offsprings of hot passions and passions are always temporary. It never has or can have any grain of reason as its basis. So the love that is born in a moment dies with the moment. The first phases of passion often conceal the angularities of mind and behaviour of the lovers but as soon as the phase passes away sharp angularities begin to come between them and become issues of mutual distrust and hatred. Moreover there are the unavoidable circumstantial set-backs in the form of want of money, pregnancy, loss of physical charm etc. The man takes to drinking,

the woman seeks the love of another man and thus they part in the middle of the path which they swore to cross until eternity.

In my case the drinking habit of Rameshda and my pregnancy were the issues that made us part. If Rameshda had married me according to our Hindu rites he could have never left me like this. Not to talk of social chastisement or fear, at least the fear of law would have put a check on him.

The freedom of enjoyment is unrestricted in illegal love, no doubt; but the freedom of separation is also unrestricted. Hence Rameshda could leave me so easily. Today our society would accept Rameshda with open arms and would even praise him. But I live outside the border-line of our society with all the burden of infamy on my head.

But sad to record here, that even that did not kill the germ of ill passion in me. Even in the pure atmosphere of Mohantaji's *Ashram*, the seed of passion germinated within me. With all the glamour of a promise of heavenly bliss it again beckoned me and I followed it again, as if in a swoon.

The Fall.

Those women who wished to lead an honest life found shelter in this Refuge. They earned their livelihood by some means of spinning or by some other sister arts. While there was also another set of women who were like me, forced to take its shelter. Finding no place in society or in the family they had no alternative but to come here. But the Refuge could not appease the cravings of their nerves. They always felt uneasy within its border and almost all of them were young girls. When I entered the Refuge there were only three or four elderly widows, who were satisfied living within the walls of the Refuge but the rest belonged to the particular set which I have just mentioned

Gradually I came to learn that those women who have run away from the shelter of society being led by passion or being seduced by bad men do not take the problem of what to eat seriously. What confronts them is the problem of how to live. A city like Calcutta can offer various sorts of avocations for women but I have seen that almost all of the women that have taken to these avocations are also in

the same line with the fallen women. The woman that sells bettle, the maid-servant of any hostel or boarding, the ordinary maid-servant in every house, the woman who sells vegetables and fishes in the bazar, the cook, the labour-woman, the actress, the Kirtanwali, the nurse, the music-teacher, the female doctor, the female clerks of the Railway and the Telegraph Office can live an honest life, if they wished to live so, with the little that they earn for their livelihood. But my long experiences have always proved the contrary.

I had concealed the name and address of my father from the management of the Refuge. All that they knew was this, that I belonged to a respectable Brahmin family and being seduced by a bad man I had come out from the family shelter, while a virgin and had been left alone to my fate as a pregnant woman. Also I made it known that I knew something of reading and writing.

I had a great desire to leave Brindabon and come to Calcutta, the reason being that at least I would be able to meet Mukulda and Kamala. In the desert of life they seemed to me to be a little bit of oasis ; but within the walls of the Refuge I found it very difficult even to have any news of them.

Soon I got acquainted with some girls of my age. Amongst them Rajabala and Kalidasi, reference of whose lives would be made later on, were my chums. They require a little introduction, which I must offer here. Rajabala was a daughter of the Swarna-Banik class. Her father lived at Calcutta and as usual she was married very early. Both her father and father-in-law were well-to-do men. But as luck would have it, she became a widow just after a year of her marriage. When she came to age, she secretly fell in love with a young neighbour belonging to the Kayastha family. The wife of her brother helped her in this affair. The young man was an enthusiast in the Swadeshi affair and his days passed by in shouting "Bande-Mataram" and in receiving the secret loves of a young widow. For three years they enjoyed their clandestine love and one day she managed to get out of her home with the plea of going to the Ganges for a bath with the maid-servant and never returned. From that time her life has passed through many unfavourable current till it has reached the shore of the Refuge.

Kalidasi had her husband. She was the daughter of an iron-smith and she had beauty. The rogues abducted her away from her husband and for one complete year she was made

to roam with them. At last she reached the court but she could not reach the mind of her husband. He refused to take her back. A relation of her provoked her to become a prostitute but a pleader coming to know of the fact managed to send her to the Refuge.

Gradually we came to learn more of our fate. Even the Refuge was not safe for us. The authority began to show special aptitudes towards those girls that had youth and beauty. Soon their attention fell on me. My tasks grew easier and my room soon became furnished. My dresses were also richer. I was of course glad for the special concession but the other girls became jealous. Kalidasi and Rajabala would often taunt me saying, 'Well, now the wind blows for you !'

One of the members of the management was deeply attracted towards me and I succumbed. Occasionally he passed nights in my room. Soon I came to learn that other girls also enjoyed the same fate secretly.

One day I proposed for marriage to my new lover, but he did not agree to it. Kalidasi, Rajabala and I often talked of our secret loves and instructed by me they also proposed marriage to their lovers ; but their proposals also met the same fate. This made us think that, if we were to sell our youth and beauty

why then like a thief? Why should we not demand the full price thereof in the open market of love?

From that night we did not allow our lovers to enter our rooms. As a reply we were made to suffer various kinds of torture and humiliation. We seriously thought to leave the Refuge but we were helpless and alone—where we were to stand?

The European war was then raging in full fire. Many nurses were being sent to the frontiers from India. So there was a dearth of *nurses in the local hospitals of even such prominent cities as Calcutta, and Bombay.* I used to read the papers that came to the Refuge to my mates.

One day Rajabala came and proposed, "Well, let us be nurses!"

"But it depends so much on the authorities of the Refuge," I replied.

One day while Sj.—Das came for inspection Rajabala put the proposal before him. He was glad to hear of it and engaged a doctor to give us preliminary lessons. Often we were taken to the hospital to have a practical view of the thing.

But our lovers had not really forsaken us even then. Their torture grew from more to

more and one of the girls being quite unable to bear them any more jumped from the wall and had her legs broken. The case was reported in the Police Court but I do not remember the result.

One evening, Rajabala, Kalidasi, another girl whose name I do not remember and myself took a cab and went to Tollygaunj. From there we took the tram and landed just before the *Sadharan Bramho Samaja* in the Cornwallis Street.

The place was known to me. Remembering the days when often accompanied by my father I visited this place, tears came to my eyes. When we reached the place, the prayer has been just finished and the crowd was dispersing. We were dressed in the Bramho fashion, so we had no difficulty in mixing with the crowd.

Owing to the inspiration of Rajabala who thought that the doors of the Bramho Samaj is open to all, we often thought of approaching the Samaj. We had taken it for granted that if we could accept Bramhoism, marriage would not be an impossibility for us. But soon we came to learn that it was more impossible there than anywhere.

Just in front of us stood an old man, with a well-built body and long beards. Noticing him

Rajabala whispered into my ears, "He seems to be Rev. Krishna Kumar Mitra—let us salute him." Instantly we four knelt down and saluted him touching his feet. Most affectionately he enquired of the reason of our approaching him and we candidly confessed everything about the Refuge and the ill treatment that we were receiving from the authority and disclosed our great desire to be incorporated into the Bramho Samaj.

Hearing us he replied, "Well, you see, I alone cannot offer you protection. It is necessary that I should consult other men of the Samaj." With this he addressed another old man who was standing near him and told him everything. But the other gentleman sneered and said, "O, no, that can never be! They have a vitiated past. Do you mean to say that we will entertain vice in our community?" We returned disappointed; but while returning we again saluted Rev. S. Krishna Kumar Mitra and he accepted our homage; but while we were going to touch the feet of the other gentleman he sternly refused it. Afterwards we came to know that he was Hirambo Babu. Afterwards I met the gentleman once. I do not want to mention the event lest it might hurt him.

Thus left to our destiny we were lost in anxiety about our future life. The Refuge would

not accept us any more and we had no mind even to return there. Suddenly the name of Kamala flashed in my mind I knew her address and I hoped that at least for a few days we would be able to keep on there. We had a cab engaged and speeded towards Baghbazar.

But when we reached the address, we were totally lost in finding another tenant in that house. They could not inform the whereabouts of Kamala. All the way I was glad to imagine to meet Kamala but when I came to know of the fact that they were not there I was almost lost in anguish. Mukulda's address I did not remember. Where to go? Where to stay? Rajabala came to rescue and said, "I have a place where we can stay over-night." The night was deep and we agreed to follow Rajabala.

That same hackney carriage led us to a prostitute house at Harkata Lane. The keeper of the brothel was known to Rajabala in her former days. She had engaged the whole house herself and had it sublet to different prostitutes room by room. By this process she had some additional income over and above her profession. Such women are called as 'Bariwalli', in the profession. Everybody knew her as Rani Bariwalli.

Seeing Rajabala after so long a period and also seeing three more girls with her, she was

mightily pleased, With great care and affection she apportioned a well-furnished room for us. She also arranged for our food. Rajabala began to converse with her but queer perplexities tormented my mind. This was for the first time that I entered into the room of a prostitute. I was feeling nervous. The room was in the ground floor. There was no air. A queer malodour permeated the air. Here a drunkard was vomiting, there some-body was abusing. Everywhere there was confusion and chaos. It completely broke my nerve.

Next morning the girl whose name I did not remember proposed that she would go to Beliaghata where she said she had her relative. And she went away. We had to remain there for three or four days more. Meanwhile the *Bariwalli* induced me and Rajabala to accept the profession. I had no strength to refute her subtle designs and discourses. The main purport of her reasoning was this—that prostitutes are independent. Heaven has bestowed them youth and beauty and the power to seduce men—and why? That is only for earning their livelihood. The lawyer sells his intelligence—the sage sells his wisdom—even the religious teacher sells his *Mantra*—why then beauty would not sell her body? Every commerce has its risks and pitfalls. All the

prominent members of the society are enslaved to the prostitutes. The wealth of the nation flows to them. A single glance of their eyes costs thousands.

I succumbed and the *Bariwalli* began to search for a quarter for me. Kalidasi remained there. Just near the place where the City College stands now, there was a *busti* and we hired two huts. Rani *Bariwalli* offered us some money for our initial expenditures and had our rooms arranged.

Even then I did not exactly knew the depth of deterioration that evil company invariably leads to. Gradually I began to forget whatever I had learnt in my school-days. All those lessons of history, geography and poetry vanished in the air. The people with whom I had to associate myself never cared to talk of books or other thing. They only talked of their games, their vulgar love-stories and thousand and one immoral things. They had to manage their cooking and other domestic business themselves. They even went marketing but I and Rajabala could not attempt that ourselves as we still had some grain of modesty in us.

The lewd lovers of the concubines are generally called as "Babus." Often there were

great quarrels concerning these *Babus*. If any *Babu* of any woman entered the room of another woman, it immediately took the shape of a quarrel. Every one joined in that quarrel and I too was not an exception. Gradually I become used to those vulgar tunes and words that floated in the unholy air of the brothel. The little learning that I had acquired from my school only brought me to ruin by heightening my pride and notions about life and when required it had not the stamina to protect me against the onslaughts of vice.

At evening we used to visit the *Kali Bari* at *Thanthania* and stand before it with the pretext of seeing the *Arati*—the daily worship of the Goddess. At first I felt nervous fearing that I might be seen by who knows any member of our family. I confessed it to Rajabala who tried to dispel my fear saying that our house was in a different part of the town and that in a big city like Calcutta nobody cares to know any one. I was made to understand that and I also used to follow them to the *Kali-Bari*. Within me there still lingered a desire to meet Mukulda, if chance would have it.

\ One winter night as we were returning home from the temple, we saw a man following us with his wrapper wrapt round his head.

He followed us up to our gate and thence entered into the room of Rajabala. Next morning Rajabala, came to me and said, 'Do you know the man that followed us last night?—He is a professor of, God knows, what college situated near the Baithak khana Bazar. His name is *Sree—padhyaya*. He had visited me twice or thrice before." The name came as a thunder bolt to me. Often I had heard from Mukulda that he is a great professor of literature. I hoped to gather the information of Mukulda from him, if possible.

Rani *Barnali* used to visit us occasionally. Gradually all my maiden fears dwindled away. I saw all other women moving about freely—enjoying without being uneasy—roaming wherever they liked to roam and without any fear whatsoever. Smelling my nervousness they would say, "Whom you are afraid of now? As soon as you have registered your name as a prostitute and have declared that I voluntarily have taken the profession, who can there be of whom you can be afraid of? When you are out to dance, you must keep off vain modesty from off the door!"

To this note of assurance Rani *Barnali* had something more to add

"When your father take you to be as good as dead and has declared that he would not

accept you, moreover you are not even begging for it—then what's the necessity of fearing your father?" added she.

I replied, "Well, that is another thing, but just to think how mortified he would be to see his own daughter selling her body!"

But she was stubborn and replied, "Well, if he wished to save himself from that shame and grief he should have taken you back under his shelter when you sought for it. Wait a few days, my child, and the profession that you have taken would hold before your eyes many pictures that you had never dreamt of before. You should see for your own eyes that the daughter is actually selling her body in the very nose of her father; would see the mother actually dressing the daughter that she had borne in her own womb for the profession—would see the families of brothers, sisters, parents and relatives depending solely on the illegal earning of their daughter. It is not only we that are fallen, the whole structure of society has toppled down."

Rajabala and I listened to her quite amazed. After a pause she again went on saying, "One day you might see even your Nanda-dada in your room. Your Mukulda you might meet here sitting in your room. Excuse me if I say

that even it is not impossible that you may meet your father in this very house !”

I shivered with shame But she went on, “What to say, my child ! You have seen the girl that came from Rambagan the other day and do you know her history ? Her father’s name is Bhattacharyya He was a well reputed professor in a Calcutta College After retiring from service he is passing his days with his own daughter born out of his own concubine. This is the order of the day. Much have I seen and known and it is left to you now to know and learn those things !”

One day I saw one of my neighbours decorating a picture with flowers She was a bit advanced in age but still she was beautiful On enquiry I learnt that the picture was of Rev. Shib Nath Sastri

“How is it that you are decorating his picture ?” I wondered and asked

“When I was a girl of seventeen or eighteen” she replied, “a kindly old prostitute gave me shelter. She was the daughter of a carpenter of Champatolah When she was only seven she became a widow and it were Vidyasagar and Shibnath Sastri themselves who tried to arrange for her re-marriage In her early days all Shibnath Sastri as her brother.

But chance led her to be a prostitute. One day Shibnath Sastri came to her place to implore her to leave the profession. I was then in that very house. But his efforts bore no fruit. Repentance visited her when it was too late. I called her as my mother. It was she who used to decorate this picture daily with flowers. On her death-bed she gave the picture to me and wished that I should continue decorating it as long as I lived. And hence you see me decorating the picture with flowers."

"Shibnath Sastri was so great that he never hesitated to visit a brothel in order to save a sinking soul!" I wondered.

She raised her hands in salutation to the picture and said, "He was able to save many a soul like ours. I have heard that he rescued the daughter of a prostitute of Dacca, named Lakshimani and had her married to a Brahmo young man."

"And now where stands the Brahmo Samaj," I said, "The other day we voluntarily offered ourselves to be rescued but they refused us. One Herumbo Babu (afterwards I came to know that he was Principal Herambo Chandra Maitra himself) even did not accept our *Pranam*, just because we were fallen. If we had met Shibnath Sastri, I hope, we would have been saved."

Gradually my health began to break down At the instruction of Rani Barnwall I had swallowed some medicine to prevent pregnancy But after that I began to suffer from various ailments, but curious enough, Ryabala who had also taken the same medicine did not suffer a little Gradually I became very lean and weak My limbs began to ache and there appeared ugly pimples all over my body

The pimples gradually developed into sores They said that I must have a hospital treatment

I lost all hope of life All night long I had to lie in my bed alone with horrible pain and tortures Tears came and were dried up silently. None ever knew of it Often I did think that it were a bliss to die even Outside my room they were raving in wine and debauchery None to attend me Everywhere was ugliness and horror Whenever I thought of my neighbours I seemed to see a hoard of hogs rolling on mud and dung

At last they took me to the hospital I had to stay there for three months When I returned I had not a single copper with me

The Society we live in

"It is easy to have the bounty of bread and butter—and you shall have your measure"—These were the blessed words of the reverend Mohunta of Brindabon. It became too true in my life. It is not very difficult to escape the clutches of poverty. But there is none to save you from the onslaughts of passion. On the otherhand there are thousands to push you on into the octopus grasp of the demon of your desires.

Ranimashi now took me to her own quarters. A suitable room on the first floor had just been vacated there. Once again she came to my rescue with pecuniary aid. I had not learnt then that these self-offered charities drag us down into the pit of utter depravity.

With the little education that I had, I could have easily taken my place in a family as a tutoress. I could have procured a job in the telephone exchanges. I could have been a hospital-nurse, or even, a music teacher. But there were none by me to lead me to these honest means of sustenance. On the contrary wicked suggestions

continually poured into my ears by Ranimashi to put my youth and my beauty for sale in the open market

I said, "Well, Ranimashi, you see, my complexion is now devoid of its former lustre, my whole frame has become dry and hard, and I can no more boast of a beautiful head of glossy, silken hair. How will these now fetch me anything in this profession?" Ranimashi however was ready with her wits. She said, "Don't think that a public woman has to rely only on her physical charms. These lewds are not often victims of beauty, why, don't you see plain women, nay, even most ugly women reaping a better harvest than so many real beauties? You know that Cupid is a blind god. When these nocturnal visitors prowl about the doors of these women, Cupid is wide awake with all his naughty pranks."

Then Ranimashi initiated me into some of the secrets of the profession. She gave me lessons in the art of coquettrey, in order to hook the victims. Whatever be our sorrows and pangs within, we must blossom forth in radiant smile while we are to receive our visitors. Make love to them with all the appearance of sincerity. I learnt how

I should take the bowl of wine to my lips and pretend to sip its contents, in case the man in question to be a wine-biber. We are to read the psychology of every visitor in order to show ourselves up to his likings. I learnt all these arts of deception and felt that a new, a different Manoda took her birth within my breast.

I was a clever singer. I have already said that I was also endowed with a sweet voice. This accomplishment is of great service to a prostitute. Ranimashi had an expert coach engaged for my musical training. She said, "Your prayer-hall music and patriotic songs will scarcely stand a chance here. The tunes that find favour with the frequenters to these dens are *lapeta, hindi* high class *Thungri, Kirtans* too are vogue." In three or four months I made a great progress. *Kirtans* however required a longer time.

Along with these arts of deception I had also to learn how to probe into the motives and characters of our visitors. At a glance we are to know the nature of our visitor, whether he has come with a motive of robbery, or whether he is suffering from venereal diseases, or if he be a hard-boiled

rogue or a goodly simpleton. On several occasions I fell a victim to nefarious plots. A class of men frequent our saloons for the only purpose of robbery, and sometimes do away with the lives of these unfortunate women. Thus these women are to ply their ugly trade at great risks. They are to admit unknown men into their apartment for the sake of only four or five rupees, and it may turn out that the treacherous paramour would stab her and decamp with her jewellery. The miserable woman sleeps her last sleep and thus Heaven's retribution takes its steady toll.

A gentleman visited my apartment. He was a leading physician of Calcutta. As far as we were aware, he was still a bachelor. I am grateful to him for his services. He selected several efficacious remedies for me, and I soon recouped my health. He was a highly talented and skilful physician, and it would have been beyond my means to procure his services, if I had to pay for them. Whenever he passed two or three hours with me, he would pay me ten or twenty rupees, sometimes he would even take me for a drive in his car. We would drive along the stand, take a stroll in the Eden Gardens or hire a table in the Grand Hotel, and return

home late in the night. He would on these occasions pay me fifty rupees. Thanks to his generosity, I earned not less than two hundred rupees a month.

Ranimashi warned me and said, "Child, go on earning while there is yet time. Remember you are to become old, and save as much as you can against that winter of life. Otherwise, a hard lot will await you. Don't you see that we get no friend in this trade. Hard cash, and nothing else, will stand you in good stead." While with this physician, I had stopped all additional earnings and so this admonition from Ranimashi who knew that this paramour would not stick. And she was right. That year in the month of Ashwin a fierce cyclone burst over East Bengal, followed by tremendous loss of human life and crops. A relief fund was started in Calcutta under the lead of the late. Byomkesh Chakravarti and C. R. Das. Several thousands of rupees were collected. Youngmen paraded the streets with accompaniments of music and collected donations. They visited our quarters too, and we paid our quota to the fund.

One day my physician paramour told me, "Well Mani, it will be helping

Mr. C. R. Das if you form a party of prostitutes and collect money for this fund. He thinks that every group of our society should have a hand in this. Don't you think it possible?"

I replied, "You know that I am a fresh recruit in this trade and have a small circle of acquaintances. But I shall do my best."

He replied, "I know some women of Ram-bagan, Shonaghchi and Fulbagan. The services of the actresses can also be procured."

It appeared that he was known to C. R. Das. Through his attempts and with the co-operation of some of his friends a few thousands were collected from our quarters. This is the first time that I took a hand in a work of public benefit. This event brought for me an opportunity to touch the feet of C. R. Dass. When we saluted and placed the purse at his feet, tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. He blessed us by placing his hand upon our head. *Desbandhu*, the friend of the country really he was!

One day I paid a visit to Rajabala's rooms. They were now furnished with costly furniture. A bedstead, several long mirrors placed against the walls, and book shelves

added to the comforts of her rooms. There were cushions on the bed-stead, and a few fresh ornaments adorned her body. She had paid off her debt to Ranimashi and had also some cash in her coffer. I had no idea how a prostitute living in a dingy tiled-hut could secure such incomes. Rajabala satisfied my curiosity thus. "Men of various tastes visit public women. Some are even scions of rich families. They are accompanied by their friends and make no secret of it. They care very little for public opinion. They indulge in drinks; songs, musical concerts and various other amusements. They do not visit these tiled huts. They lead their pilgrimage to Rambagan and Sonagachi. There is another class of Babus who are in constant dread of exposure, because they occupy high positions. They come here only for the satisfaction of their sexual appetite. They do not want songs or music. Secretly they come and secretly they go and their fame remains untarnished in society. They belong to the blessed groups of poets, literatures, social reformers, legal luminaries, school masters, college-professors, political leaders and their assistants, high officials, Brahmos, Mahamahopadhyas, Sanskrit Pandits holding the titles of Vidyabhushan, and Torkbagish, Priests, Mohunts and religious

preceptors A famous pleader practising in the High Court visits my room He comes of a very high Brahmin family His name is Babu

He is rather advanced in years He pays me handsomely Once I told him in a jocular mood, 'You are sure to occupy a high rank in the High Court' Accidentally my prophecy turned true So in the exuberance of satisfaction, he has bought me these furniture. This costly ring too is his present "

I waited long enough and was about to leave, as it became quite dark when a visitor entered Rajabala accorded him a warm reception I came out and whispered into her ears 'Well, now who is this? He looks like a Sanskrit Pandit' Rajabala said, 'He is one of my paramours He is a famous professor and is a Mahamahopadhyaya He is now quite mad after me But he is a well known figure among prostitutes, and they say, he is not quite a good client, as he is always after "fresh fields and pastures new" He always visits tiled huts I am of course extorting as much as I can, as there is no knowing when he will slip off my grasp "

Kalidashi had left Harlata Lane and was residing at Rambagan A rich Bhatia trader has taken a fancy to her She was now in opulence⁴¹ Two spacious rooms she occupied on the second

floor,—a bed room and a drawing room. There were electric light and fans. There were also those bed-steads, long mirrors, book-shelves, pictures, marble tables, linoleum covering on the floor, a bed spread on the floor covered over with snow-white sheets, silver trays for betel leaves and also ash-trays. There were showcases displaying beautiful clay toys of Krishnagar. She owned three sets of diamond-set ornaments. She wore valuable Benares Saris while going out and put on Santipur Saris when keeping at home. Her Bhatia trader paid her three hundred rupees every month, besides house rent and all other establishment charges.

Kalidasi's fortune was a miracle of two or three months, like the touch of Aladin's wonderful lamp. It made a rich ambition rise before me. An evil spirit continually peeped out from the core of my heart and thus tempted me, "You too may one day be as much fortunate as Kalidasi". From that day I pursued the will-o-the-wisp of my ambition.

Kalidasi was a handsome girl. This life of ease and comfort added a fresh lustre to her beauty. Though she had come from a village, she was a good singer. Kalidasi had found a matron in her house and it was she who had introduced her to this Bhatia trader

and had her brought to Rambagan Kalidasi suggested that I should also transfer my quarters there and I waited for a suitable opportunity I had already cleared Rani Mashis dues and was quite free from debt now. Some furniture too adorned my room. I formed acquaintance with a gentleman, a Brahmin youth who held a responsible position in a Bank. His name was Mr Padhyaya. Within two or three days he fell in love with me. My songs specially appealed to him.

He proposed to take me to a better house and said 'Harikata is the rendezvous for low-class people. I would rather like to see you living in a better style' Alas—for a prostitute to discriminate between high and low classes, to mark a line of division between prostitute of different grades—to create castes among prostitutes! Of course I was against this proposal, for fear of losing the patronage of my physician paramour. But I did not disclose my real motive, and said, "I have contracted some debts here, the lessee too is to be paid her dues. So it will three or four months before I shall be able to shift my quarters."

Occasionally this bank officer passed

nights in my room. Some friends also used to accompany him. They took little wine. I would sometimes treat them to a good table. Thus our intimacy increased. This paramour was very fond of chewing betel-leaves and used those covered with gold or silver leaf. Indeed he was a fashionable man. As a respectable officer of the Bank, he had a motor-car at his disposal, and used to come to my house in that car. On several occasions he even took me for a drive in that car.

For sometime I tried to manage both sides of my business but it was not to be so. The physician scented the existence of another paramour and reduced his visits. At last he stopped coming at all. The Padhyaya paramour was constantly urging me to shift my quarters. I referred to my imaginary debts and thus extracted five hundred rupees in cash. I told him that another two hundred rupees will be required to start my establishment in a new house and he paid me that too. So I shifted to Rambagan, close to Kalidasi's and hired two comfortable rooms.

My physician paramour is now a famous man of our country. As I have said before he was not married even then. Since my taking to this life of a prostitute, I have

always preferred unmarried youngmen My argument was that as they had no wife to share their affection, they would be more devoted to their hired women But experience has taught me otherwise I have learnt that those, who are fond of their wedded partners in life, are seen to feel an attachment for their hired women too Unmarried youths are generally fickle minded, and love none with any amount of constancy I have heard that after leaving me, my physician paramour has transferred his affections to several women one after another He has even gone the length of creating scandals in decent families God only knows the truth, but the papers tried to suggest it

At Rambagan I found myself surrounded by all sorts of comforts Yet occasionally my mind was tossed by an unhappy memory I got no clue to the whereabouts of Kamala or Mukulda. Often I dreaded of meeting my father, my uncle or Nandada Kamala and Mukulda were my confidants when I took this life of shame So I felt a hankering after knowing their whereabouts Even with this short experience I have fully realised the dangers of prostitute life And I had a firm conviction in my mind that in whatever contempt I might be held by

others, Kamala and Mukulda would never forsake me.

At Rambagan I renewed my studies. A book-shelf was soon procured by my paramour and books of Bengali and English literature filled the shelves. My paramour was pleased to see my thirst for knowledge. Two monthly magazines, the Prabashi and the Bharatbarsha, he subscribed for me, and brought the daily news-papers direct from his office. I used to go through all of them. Thus what with my musical pursuits what with my literary occupations and what with the loving care of my paramour, for the time being I settled to a life of peace and comfort.

A radical change has come over our modern literature, and as it has a close connection with the life of misguided girls like me, I think I may be excused if I digress into the province of literary criticism. The characters of fallen women depicted by Bankim Babu and other contemporary authors rouse a deep sense of contempt for them in the reader's mind. In fictions like "Krishna Kanta's Will" and "Chandrashekhar," the author gives a graphic representation of the bitter consequences, pitiable plights and the severest ;

which the life of a wicked woman ultimately leads her. The darkest sides of her life were exposed to the view of the reader and the horrified reader shrank at the sight and felt the strongest aversion for this pest of society. Amritlal Bose too followed the same principle in his dramatic production "Taru Bala". Then there came a change in the angle of vision and Rabindranath depicts another side of the life of a fallen woman in some of his novels so as to induce a sympathetic sigh from the reader. But what seemed to be mere covert hints in his writings became overt attempts to secure active sympathies for misguided women and even confirmed harlots in some of the characters painted by Sarat Chatterji, Naresh Sen Gupta and several young votaries of this new cult. They are of opinion that "Prostitutes have no doubt revolted against the idea of chastity, but they do not for that matter occupy an inferior position as members of society. Why should they be eternally mail as objects of contempt when we find among them proofs of fair dealings, piety, devotion to God, kind heartedness and generosity? The social constitution may be taken to task for their lives of shame; but you can't blame them

The settled convictions of young men and girls got a pleasant shock by these novels and light literatures. They read "The Travels of Srikantha" and pined for a meeting with a character of the type of the fallen Rajlakshmi. They read "Shubha" and promenaded the pleasure resorts of Calcutta in the hope of coming across an actress of that type. They become mad after "Saraju" of "Para-Parey". The long experience of my sad life convinces me that the number of young men coming in contact with immorality has of late been on the increase.

The school of modern novel writers proclaim that this departure in the character-painting of women living immoral lives constitutes what is known as the "Realistic Art". A veritable poison is thus sapping the whole social fabric. Highly educated young men are enlisting themselves as theatrical actors. Scions of aristocratic families are appearing on the stage with their wives and daughters before a packed house of several thousand men. Fathers and mothers are sending their girls to dance on the theatrical stage. The husband is a witness to his wife making love to another on the stage. The father sees his daughter displaying skilful tactics of lovemaking before the

foot lights. 'The poet, who is held in high regard by the whole world that expects highest and purest ideals from him is attending theatrical rehearsals as a coach to the actresses. The society looks to the Brahmo community for improved ideals of enlightened tastes, but they too are drinking the nectar of this new art. Respectable personages of the type of Rabindranath Tagore, Ramananda Chattopadhyaya, Lady Abala Bose, Mrs Kamini Roy, Mrs. B. L. Chaudhuri, Mrs Sarala Debi advocate this practice of dancing for grownup girls of gentle families. I have gone through various controversies on this subject in the columns of periodicals, and they have sent through me a pang of excruciating torture.'

But, why do I indulge in these discussions while writing my autobiography? Because I see in every grade of society evidence of that want of moral control and caution which has been the root cause of the downfall of so many public women. My aim and my earnest prayer are that the attention of persons who have the welfare of the society at their heart may be directed to this growing evil. I fell into the snare of a rash, indiscreet young man. Are not

the guardians of young women like Rani and Chuni aware that these girls too have found lovers in their dancing and music masters? I have gone astray; yet, the ugly prospect of my society making for the abyss of moral turpitude pains me. The artist paramour of our Chuni is a leading patron of Theatre Society. Chuni has told us of some ugly affairs connected with the Society. But I refrain from alluding to them.

The consequence of this Neo-Realistic Art is seen in other fields too. Formerly contributions to funds for public benefit, from these public women, were very often refused. So much so that landlords of Muffassil estates would not even accept rent from these women. Gradually this attitude underwent a change. The late Deshabandhu Chittaranjan entertained very liberal views in this matter. He not only accepted contributions from public women for social needs, but he actually invited their co-operation. He had a high aim, but we with our debased hearts frustrated his noble object. From 1918 onward the leadership of the country came into his hands. At the same time the trend of modern literature too was sympathetic towards fallen women. So we got a good opportunity to

come in touch with gentle societies. The result will be described in another place.

But before I describe how we were allowed to join the political and social activities for the furtherance of public good, I shall close this chapter after a brief reference to one or two other incidents of my life.

Once a woman hired a room in our house. She was at an advanced stage of pregnancy. Soon she let me into the secrets of her life. This widow belonged to a poor *Kayastha* family. Her religious preceptor Vidyabhushana was the cause of her ruin. But he was keeping himself at a safe distance now. For fear of a scandal no one offered shelter to this unfortunate woman and so she was compelled to find a lodging in this abominable place, where shame and sin have free access. I came forward with whatever help I can offer to this miserable woman.

According to my suggestions she wrote to Vidyabhushana. A few days passed and fortunately he came here one day. I took the first opportunity to make acquaintance with him. I had consulted my paramour of the Bank on this subject. One day I

put the matter to Vidyabhushana thus: "Well, Sir, you see this woman is now in great distress. What will she do now if you forsake her at this stage?" But at first he paid little heed to my appeal. So I got excited and said "Well gentleman, we public women are cast off by society, and no doubt you look down upon us. You occupy a high position in society. Are you not afraid of our reproaches? Shame on you! Taking advantage of your position as her preceptor, you have ruined her life,—have driven her to the darkest depth of shame. Why, are you not versed in religious tenents? Do you not teach others? Fie on your learning! Fie on your knowledge of religious texts! We are prostitutes, so he is our proper abode after our death. But do you know why you will not go to hell? Because such a hell has not yet been constructed." Vidyabhushan kept silent. But I went on and holding my warning finger before him, I said in an angry tone, "You may go now if you wish. But be sure, we shall get a decree from the Court, and you will have to maintain her all along. You think, you will plead innocence. But all the inmates of this house will prove by their evidence that you visited her and you are thus

father of the baby in her womb. We are veteran liars. So, we shall not have the least hesitation to speak a few lies to do good to an innocent victim of a vicious debauché like you."

Vidyabhushan went away without giving any definite reply. But we were sure he had been frightened. So, a few days after he came and handed over to me a sum of hundred rupees, saying, "Please meet all her necessary expenses from this money." I accepted it and supplied some necessary articles to her. When she had given birth to a child Vidyabhushan came and took them away. I have learnt on enquiry that he did not give her necessary help. The vicious character of this man was almost an open secret. He had brought shame and ruin on other female disciples too. I sent an anonymous letter to his employer, disclosing all these secrets, for, I thought such a dangerous man must be brought to justice. As a result, he was dismissed from all his paying jobs. Then, in his old age, he married a girl of sixteen, and thus appeased his carnal appetite. We are public prostitutes, yet, we too shrink with horror and contempt from these ugly sores of the society to which we no longer belong.

' A woman, named Shushila, lived close by. She was the mistress of a Nawab. He rolled in wealth. A palatial residence built at enormous cost waits for him in his capital town. But he would not live there. He lives in the sweet company of his mistress in Calcutta. His once flourishing capital town has been turned into an abode of dogs and jackals. The tenants live miserable lives. For want of proper supervision and management his state became more and more encumbered. He sucks the life blood of his poor tenants and employs whatever he has to the worship of this prostitute. Of course, it is not strange that a person of this type would fall a prey to the snares of a prostitute. But I have my reasons for depicting his character. I was a constant visitor to her apartments. Every now and then valuable articles were brought to her as presents from the capital town such as, costly furniture, pictures, screens, diamonds and jewellery, mirrors ivory articles with beautiful works of arts on them. Some of them were put to sale in the market; others adorned Shushila's Saloon. These precious articles had been procured by the ancestors of the Nawab, and kept stored up, as a mark of respect to their august memory, in the ancient palace

Men in search of historical curiosities would find great interest in these articles. It pained me to see how these invaluable articles were wasted away like so many trifles for the mere satisfaction of the vanity of a prostitute. Those who are so disrespectful to the memories of their ancestors should never hope to find a place among the free nations of the world.

A motor car was also purchased for her. Shushila is now surrounded by greater luxuries than the chief Begums of the Nawab. He loves her. He cares for her. He pays her a monthly allowance of thousand rupees, and for this he has now to contract debts and mortgage his jewellery. Woe to these debts, he had once to attend a civil court as defendant in a suit. Thus has this scion of one of the noblest families been dragged down from his high pedestal.

Though prostitutes, we keep ourselves informed of the current political movements. Those who talk of political emancipation should consider, how the country can be lifted out of her political subjugation when the descendants of emperors and Nawabs pay such scanty respect to the memories of their glo-

rious ancestors and are concerned more with satisfying the whims and pleasures of contemptible creatures like these prostitutes. The mighty structure of independence can never be built out of these impure and worthless rubbishes

In the Eddy of Sinful life.

. Prohibition was also one of the main features of the Gandhi-movement. Picketing before the wine shops was resorted to by our young men. One day while my servant was going to enter the wine-shop, they prevented him from doing so and asked, "For whom you are to buy wine?" The servant gave my address. They enquired of my name to which the servant had replied, "Her name is Firoza Bibi." As I liked to put on dresses of Firoza colour, they knew me as Firoza Bibi at Rambagan.

The next day when I was resting after taking my noon-day meal, the servant informed that some one was waiting downstairs for me. Ordering the servant to bring him up, I was arranging my hair before the huge mirror in my room, when suddenly I was astonished to see the shade of a friend of Nandada reflected in the mirror.

He wore Khadder, had a Madrasi saddle on and a big stick in his hand. His hairs

were cropped very close. Without disclosing how much puzzled I was, most curtly I asked him—"Who are you, please? And what business you may have here?" But I was trembling within.

The new-comer once glanced me from head to foot and with supreme coldness exclaimed, "How is it, Mani, that you are here?" "You should know that my name is Firōza Bibi," I sternly replied.

But he was more stubborn than I could be stern. He entered the room, put the stick against the wall, caught hold of my hand and with supreme control in his voice, said "Well, take your seat here!" I obeyed like a machine and sat near him with my head down cast. I knew him and he also had recognised me. His name is Upendra.

"Mani—what damnation you have brought with you! Is this the result of education?", he exclaimed. I fell down to his feet and began to sob. He went on saying. "While we were picketting yesterday, we got the name and address of one Firoza Bibi. We are inspired by the great call of the Mahatmaji, and we have taken a vow to stop drinking and for this we -

do not mind visiting a brothel. Hence I am here and while I expected to see Firoza bibi—I see our own Mani standing before me. Remember wine should not enter this house any more !”

I got all necessary information of our family from Upen Babu. In supreme mental agony and pain, father had to sell all his Calcutta properties and was now living at his native village. Nandada's father was long dead. Nandada had joined the non-co-operation movement and Mukulda had joined the bar and was practising in the — Court. After matriculating herself Kamala has gone somewhere in upper India to learn medicine. Nandada was still a bachelor.

I implored him to pay occasional visits. But he replied, “Promise that you would not bring any more wine and with it I think I have finished my mission and I fear I have no more occasions to come here.” With this he went away without even taking any food or even a bottle in spite of my repeated requests. Occasionally we have really met such noble type of young men who had to come in our touch but always remained above the beast by contamination of vice.

I stopped bringing wine into my room. The

adherents of my Babu began to grumble and Babu himself was not pleased at the change. I used to write to Upen Babu and he was generous enough to reply them. It roused the suspicion of my Babu

That friend of Nandada was known to me from my early days. Often in my girlhood-days I had seen him in our house. He was distantly related to Nandada. Through him I have often implored Nandada to see me once but coming to know of my destiny he had sternly refused to see me any more.

Within two or three months my—Padhaya Babu left me. He began to visit that very actress with whom I had seen him flirting lately. The bank deposits were utilised in the worship of the dancing girl. As a result of maladministration and misuse the bank collapsed within a few years. He met the inevitable destiny but with him the country also received a great set-back. Many trades and industries met their untimely death. Many people suddenly came down to the level of beggars, thus bereft of all their accumulated earnings of years. A sharp scrutiny would undoubtedly lead to the real issues of the collapse. There is

record of a certain famous monthly journal being thus put to an unnatural end owing to the debauchery of its manager.

After this I took it to my mind not to remain as a kept of any single person. I had a good amount of fame as a singer. I removed to Sonagachi. A certain son of a Rajshahi Zamindar began visiting me. He was a horrible drunkard. He used often to take me to the theatres. One day as we were seated in the box, my drunken partner was a bit beyond himself and began to rave. I did not know then that his mother-in-law was sitting in the next box. Seeing him in that plight she came out and took him along with themselves. That day I returned alone. The man in question now visits another woman of the name of Satyabala who is also known to me. He is a man of much reputation in our society.

Often I was paid to attend the garden-parties of rich men. These calls were very much profitable as regards money-matters, but they were a horrible task. I have not the strength to describe the abominable disgust which one has to invariably feel.

if one is to please the rich. You are to wake up the whole night—always to act love and to tolerate every kind of drunken foolishness! These made my body and mind so sick that often I thought to be permanently relieved of this life. Deep remorse used to tear my heart to pieces. But sad to record that even then I was not able to rise above temptation. Every time I was dragged down into this horrible whirlpool.

The Tarakeswar Satyagraha was started in 1924. Many serious allegations were being attributed to Mohanta Satish Giri. As a sequel to those allegations the Government appointed a Receiver over those Devottore properties. But Swami Sachidananda and Biswananda opposed the entrance of the new receiver with their Mahabir Dal. On the other side Deshbandhu Chittaranjan stood with his Congress Party for the door being opened to the receiver. They contended that the Mohanta cannot have any personal property. The mass and every one of it has a right to enter the temple and to offer their worship. This led to a terrible confusion and the Mahabir Dal, the government, the Mohanto, the congress all were engaged in this medley.

With ten or twelve prostitutes we also started for Tarakeswar. When we reached the place we saw other sisters in profession, had previously assembled there from various places such as, Serampur, Nonadanga, Shoraphuli etc. We all assembled together and created a batch of lady volunteers. We also raised some public money to conduct the Satyagraha Movement.

We were not allowed to perform "Satyagraha" in front of the Mohunt's place, but our main duty was to protect the temple. When the police came to arrest Swami Sachchidananda, we kept him completely surrounded by ourselves, so that the Police had to go away disappointed. We began to guard the temple by turns.

The chief leaders of the Tarakeswar Satyagraha were Dr. Pratap Chandra Guha Roy and Srijukta Santosh Kumari Gupta. One day Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan went to Tarakeswar and encouraged all of us. A large amount of money was spent for our comforts. Many thousands of rupees were collected for the Satyagraha Fund. The Tarakeswar Problem was duly settled up, but I still remember the hideous things that came within my purview during the

Satyagraha Movement. The unfettered illicit relationship between the so-called Lady Volunteers who were really prostitutes and the so-called Volunteers belonging to the various parties who were nothing but designing blackguards—the way in which some people known as real workers in the country's cause, passed the nights—the proposal made to my own self by a certain Satyagrahi—all these made me come to the conclusion that religion had not been established at Tarakeswar and that the light of virtue had gone out there,

At Tarakeswar I became acquainted with a young lady named Sukriti who had gone there to visit the temple. She had a sister, Sabitri by name. They came of a very high and respectable family of Jorasanko. People say that in this family the proverbial rivals Lakshmi and Saraswati have no quarrel. But Sukriti and Sabitri both took to the life of shame and lived at Sobhabazar. A Government pleader used to visit Sukriti. Sabitri died some time ago, but when she was living, a "national worker" visited her regularly. Into what pit now have fallen even such families as were once the pride of Bengal! If I reproduce the history of many famous people of Bengal that I have heard from Sukriti's lips, society

would not perhaps believe it—and so I refrain from doing it. This family was the one that first led the way as regards promiscuous and unrestricted intermingling of males and females.

I have heard from Upen Babu that Nanda Dada has as yet kept his Brahmacharya intact and that no woman has been able to bring temptation to him. The brighter side of the Non-co operation Movement has further strengthened his character which had been formed already. An apathy for luxury and a liking for everything good are the best sides of Nanda Dada's Brahmacharya. That he never dabbled in literature like me has been beneficial to him, and poverty has served him like a friend. It is regrettable that the number of "workers" with such a spotless character is very small.

I was told that, as regards myself, Nanda Dada used to say, "If Manada relinquishes all her riches acquired by evil life and comes to me in a single cloth only, I will cherish her as my best jewel and bestow all my affection on her as before. But I cannot keep any connexion with her if she lives in the questionable quarter and leads a life of shame."

I never smoked a cigarette nor did I ever

drink. This habit of prostitutes is never conducive to their earning money. My lovers had tried their best to initiate me into these two things, but nobody was successful. Upen Babu continued picketing for a long time in the brothels for eradicating the drinking habit, and I always helped him my level best.

Pleaders, officials living in the mofussil usually come to Calcutta during the Pujah, and Christmas holidays, when many of them grace our houses with their kind presence. Zeminders and merchants come at other times too. There are many in the mofussil who every month send money here regularly to the girls in their keeping. I myself used to get money from a Rai Bahadur in Noakhali, a Zeminder in Hurdwan, a big druggist in Dacca and a pleader in Raugpur. I have a friend named Probha in Chitpur who comes of a highly respectable family of the *Sonar Bania* caste. Her lover is a pleader in Mymensingh, who had some sort of friendship with the above mentioned druggist in Dacca, which gave the latter an opportunity to come to my house. A Calcutta Barrister's unmarried daughter also lives in Probha's house. Thus passed my days in Sonagachi with fresh people everyday. I used to familiarise with fallen women who come from

respectable families I have seen very few fallen women who are as bold and courageous as the Barrister's daughter mentioned above

About this time I came across a very unfortunate affair, which I shall describe here, and this will give one an idea as to what heinous things have entered into the vitals of our society. How to eradicate the evil should be the concern of all

In central Calcutta a zeminder lives in the Badurbagan quarter His ancestors were very well known people His character is extremely bad his evil eye is always upon the wives of the families living as his neighbours He has some friend and satellites who assist him in his nefarious deeds, they tempt these wives by various artifices and bring them in for the gratification of their master's lustful passions All these heinous orgies are performed in his Calcutta house or in his garden house near by

The wives come out either out of their own accord or unwillingly through the force of circumstances Most of them do not know singing nor do they take wine—and for that kind of orgies women from Sonagachi or Rambagan had to be fetched I myself went to the garden house of this Zemindar on two

occasions, at a fee of Rs. 200 per night. My task was to sing, but I never drank. Two or three other women who also went, used to take part in the orgy of drink.

One night a call came for me to go to the Zemindar's garden-house. I took an advance payment of my fees and reached there at eight o'clock. I saw that a beautiful young lady, about 18 or 19 years old, had been brought there. Her complexion was like unalloyed gold and her face simple and lovely. I felt a pang of distress in my heart. I had witnessed the sacrifice of many chaste women at the altar of this Zemindar's detestable lust, in which misdeeds we too were his accomplices. That night I felt no inclination for singing, but was ever on the look-out for an opportunity to have a conversation with the girl.

The orgy commenced, and the Zemindar and his companions began to drink. I sang a song or two, after which the other women began to sing and dance. On the pretext of the room being too stuffy and warm I came out of the room, and when being alone, whispered to the girl, "Come, let us go into the garden for a walk." We two took ourselves on a raised platform at the *ghat* of the garden tank, and had a long conversation, the gist of which is given below.

The girl's name was Aparajita Devi. She was the daughter of a Brahmin, her father's home being in a village in Burdwan district. She had been married to a youngman of the Mukherji stock, who lived with one of his paternal aunts. Her husband had no parents living nor probably any kinsmen or relatives. He was very gentle and tender by nature, and always ministered to the slightest desires of his aunt, in the expectation, of inheriting his aunt's house.

Scandal-mongers say that the aunt had earned a good deal of money by.....her widowhood; now that she had grown incapable of doing so by reason of her old age, she continued to earn money instead by bartering away the chastity of her nephew's wives: Aparajita's husband had been married twice before, but these two girls had one after the other died by burning themselves and the aunt gave it out that these were cases of suicide. Aparajita was the third wife of her husband and had an infant son.

The aunt had tried her best to induce Aparajita too to earn money in this heinous manner, but Aparajita never agreed, whereupon the aunt began to torture her. A very wicked doctor was engaged as an accomplice

Aparajita had so far preserved her chastity.

I asked Aparajita, "What shall you do now? Do you too intend committing suicide?" Aparajita replied, "No, why shall I? I have got my father, my brother, my son; I would never commit suicide, but would not by any means sacrifice my chastity to that lustful fellow, even though I die in trying to keep it intact." I was completely overwhelmed with wonder to see the determination and extraordinary self control of this girl, who had never received any education, does not even know the rudiment of learning and has never dabbled in the study of literatures. How had she managed to get so much strength and girt within her?

I said; "Do you know what the result would be if you do not agree to their evil proposals." Aparajita replied, "Yes, I do; they will kill me. My aunt-in-law killed the other two girls also, but gave it out to the public that they had committed suicide by burning themselves with kerosine oil of their own accord. But people are not so fool as to believe that explanation everytime.

All day long I had to fight with my aunt-in-law and I made it known to them that

I would disclose everything. At this my aunt-in-law got infatuated and said that she would crush me to death. From that moment I have also taken a solemn vow to protect myself even from the touch of these people."

Her glorious attitude made my head bent low in shameful submission. Aparajita was a stranger from the abode of the gods come to this earth of ours, and myself a wretched worm crawling in ugliness and sin. The Hindu society does not only produce sinners like me, but it also nurses within its fold many heavenly souls like her. Lest my vitiated breath would pollute the pure atmosphere around her frame—I resisted the temptation of talking to her anymore. Moreover I saw her aunt-in-law approaching in the same direction with a man (whom Aparajita referred to be the identical man, the Doctor) I bowed down to her feet. She advanced and I took shelter behind a bower.

That night I dissociated from the party and on pretext of ill-health, hurried home. I had no sleep that night. Two days after the newspaper brought the tidings of her death. Her aunt-in-law had deposed before the Police that while attempting to put fuel to the oven she had caught fire. The post-

mortem examination, the Police search and even the coroner's verdict did not reveal the mystery of her death. After that even only God knows how I passed my days for weeks. Her face with the halo of divinity around her head appeared before my eyes and tormented my soul.

Does any of our so-called social reformers know how many such cases are daily enacted in the heart of our society? The great curse of those *Satis* is working within our society and it must fall.

Those murderers of chastity and the killers of all moral standards are parading with all pomp and glory amidst the very heart of our society, well established in fame and reputation, the gift of their opulence.

One-day Kalidasi came to my place Her face positively declared that she was in distress and only too soon I came to learn from her that her Bhatia Babu had become a pauper as an effect of too much wine and horse-races. Now she was in the keeping of a Marwari but she had no ready money in her hand, so she had come to me for a loan of five hundred rupees at a mortgage of her ornaments

Those people who are regular brothel goers incur two great necessary passions—one is for wine and other is for the horse race. Often we hear that so and so had earned lots of money from the race but to be exact, none of them can keep a single cowrie out of the race money. It comes from vice and to it it returns.

I had then no money with me but we had in our quarter a newcomer, Ushabala by name, who had, I knew, hard cash with her. The value of the ornaments that Kalidasi had brought with her was about a thousand rupees. So Ushabala did not hesitate much to give the amount asked as loan. Kalidasi is still living and reaping the full harvest of her sinful life like me. The other day I saw her engaged in vulgar jokes with a Mussalman Biriwala, her whole body reduced to a skeleton. A young woman of twenty six as she is, she looked like an old hag of sixty. Drinking had brought inevitable diseases along with it. She had a dirty cloth on—and who knows how she could manage to secure her daily meals! I avoided meeting her, remembering the words of the Mohantaji. There is no power on earth to transgress the laws of destiny."

I must say something of Ushabala here

She was the wife of a Brahmin Vakil of Faridpur. Some rich Mussalmans got her away from her paternal house and kept her confined in a house at Baliaghata. Sj. Mahesh Chandra Atarthi, of the *Nari-Raksha Samiti* rescued her from there with the help of police. The matter was taken up by the Police Court. Her husband disowned her as being his wife. Ushabala stayed for some time under the protection of Sj Krishna Kumar Mitra, the editor of the *Sanjibani* and director of the *Nari-Raksha Samiti*. Ushabala herself had said to me, "Krishna Kumar Mitra took me for her own daughter. He arranged for my education and had me admitted into a school to learn the art of needling. But I was not able to check the evil passion in me and I was more than eighteen. So they could not forcibly keep me under their protection, Through many a path and bye-path I have at last arrived here. I had even to sell beetle leaves in the open street for some time."

Whenever abduction cases rose high, I noticed a gentleman visiting our quarters frequently. We used to know him as Tarak Babu. Tarak Babu took three or four women to his confidence, and I was one of them. Lust of flesh did not prompt him to visit our quarters. It knew not whether he was a member of

the Woman Protection League or a detective, but I have heard him saying that he had to frequent these places in search of those destitute women who were forced to live the life of prostitute being seduced away from home. We helped in his investigations, whenever we could.

One day Tarak Babu called me and said, "Manage to enquire of the girl who has just arrived in the house in front of yours I require it." From that day I began to visit that house and gradually I grew intimate with the girl.

After a few days when Tarak Babu came, I said to him, "The girl whose information you required comes from a Brahmin family. Her name is Suruchibala. She is the daughter of a retired Engineer who has now settled down at Kashi. She was married to a certain young man of the Hoogly District. Her complain is that her husband had another wife. Suruchi had no place in her father-in-law's place. She used to live with her father at Kashi. From early days she had developed the passion for reading novels and stories. Gradually she acquired within herself the germs of unsatiable lust.

Her parents had no influence over her. Kashi is a place, where mischievous men are not a rarity and one fine evening Suruchi managed to get away from the shelter of her home and ran down to Calcutta with a man. Here at Calcutta she came in contact with many men at the stake of her womanly virtues. The Police found her in an objectionable plight and she was taken to the court. The Magistrate was at a loss as to what to do with her, when he suddenly glanced upon Sj. Mahesh Ch. Atarthy, who happened to be in the same court for some other business. The Magistrate handed over Suruchi to him and requested him to arrange for her under the Women Protection League.

Suruchi was given a shelter in the house of Krishna Kumar Mitra. With all the affection of a father, he began to lead her into the path of virtue, but she deceived this old and most venerable gentleman and managed to get out from his shelter. She took unto herself the path of vice. She is now in the keeping of a wealthy Parsi young man. She herself dressed like the memshahibs; her hairs have been bobbed; she wears short skirt and uses stockings to match the colour, of her naked arm. She can speak Hindi

brilliantly, and also she can speak some amount of English."

Tarak Babu heard everything with attention and said, 'Perhaps you do not know why she fled away from the house of Krishna Babu? Suruchi stole a gold watch of Sachin Babu, the son-in-law of Krishna Babu. At this, Mahesh Babu again took her to the Court where she applied for her name being registered as a prostitute. The magistrate gave her the permission.'

While we were thus conversing suddenly the door burst open and entered Suruchi herself with a basket full of cakes and flowers. "Mandi" she said, just we had a drive to the Newmarket and you see I have brought all these things. I have come to invite you to our tea-party to-morrow morning. Come you must. By the bye, I met that old Mahesh Attarthi to-day. I could not resist asking him, "Hallo old man, how goes the world with you?" With this she burst out in wild laughter and left the room.

I do not know what Tarak Babu could have done for Suruchi, but as I think of Suruchi and Usha, I feel they are as helpless as myself. Once in the prime of their life the

stony wall of restriction has been pierced through by the lustful thirst of passion, and all the waters of passion have burst forth through that little hole and drowned them in it. Like me, they are to suffer a great deal more, before they can again come round. Nobody can transgress the laws of Destiny.

The New Tactics

After my removal to Sonagachi, my income began to dwindle. My body too, became more and more lean owing to attacks of various diseases. I had to spend lots of money after my establishment in addition to the regular doctor's bill. Moreover I used to celebrate the holy Tithis. Every year, anyway I had to perform the Saraswati Puja. These also weighed heavily on my income.

A vakil and a barrister used to visit my room conjointly. In the partnership for my love they were as much complementary to each other as they were in their profession. To cite a code from the laws that regulate the society of prostitutes, it is very much offensive for a prostitute to indulge at the same time in love with any friend of the paramour. Of course, many amongst us are tempted to violate this law, but still she is held as infamous even among the prostitutes. Often many friends separate from each other over this issue and it often leads to murder even.

Want led me to accept both of them as my paramour. But I had not to experience any calamity whatsoever from them.

Often many of my sisters-in-profession would take me to task for this unprofessional conduct—but I overlooked all their derides. What has she to fear of a dew-drop, 'who is floating on the sea? When once in hell. I must go deep into it.

Through these two men I got acquainted with a very rich and honorable man. He paid me handsomely. Suddenly a new scheme flashed in my brain. I knew that many rich and eminent men of the country were in direct touch with these men. So I thought to employ my paramours as my tout to snare them and bring them here. They accepted my proposal and it was settled that half of the money gained from the clients that they could bring would be theirs.

Now I began the life of a prostitute in right earnest. While at Rambagan low class peoples often brought men to our rooms; but that also was stopped owing to the strict measures of Tegart Shahab.

I knew that in Calcutta many gentlemen were used as touts for prostitutes. Some of my mates even advised me to engage a few gentlemen touts but still then I could not do it. My conscience rebelled against it. But as I was approaching my journey's end I did not hesitate

to trample under my feet whatever little grain of virtue I had in me

The vakil and the barrister touts were very clever. Everyday they began to hook rich games. Some of them were sons of big Zemindars, some were great leaders, others were great doctors and tradesmen. Amongst the new games almost all of them were either of middle age or old. Even people from outside Bengal began to come in number.

Within a few months I was happy with some hard cash. My touts were also glad to make lots of money. But as I glanced inward I saw myself poor and low, Love of money led me to play false hood and deception every moment of my life. My heart had become a wilderness where wild animals prowled about. I looked into the mirror and saw the shade of hell reflected in my face—my face that once radiated like sunlight from the blue sky.

As I grew in age my patrons began to be less frequent. But my Vakil and the Barrister friend, both of them did not leave me to my fate even then. Under their direction I removed to Bhowanipur and planned for a new trick. Psychologists affirm it and through the long experience of my life I have

also come to learn of it that, whatever is gained or can be got easily, however beautiful that may be, never allures our passion. Whatever is out of the way and cannot be procured naturally allures the human mind eternally. I changed my name as Miss Mukerjee and went as the sister-in-law of my barrister friend. My this transformation acquired a new valuation. My early education stood me in good stead. Moreover the experience of my past days amply qualified me to play the role of an honourable society-lady. I dressed myself up in the latest fashion and tried with utmost skill to put forth a new edition of my vanishing youth before the enchanted eyes of love-sick men. When the 'evening shades' fell, I was to stroll with my barrister friend, supposed to be the husband of my sister. A single glance was enough to bring the unknown passers-by to be a friend, who invariably followed us to our home. There I served them tea with my own hand and unknown of my tricks, an unsatiable passion rose in their souls. I noticed with supreme satisfaction how they eagerly sought the opportunity to meet me alone and propose to me. Needless to say, I never left them unsatisfied. Every new was given to understand that he

the only man for whom I was pining so long.

It is really hard to check laughter, when I remember how many times I had to put up virgin blush in order to save my supposed maiden chastity. One day I remember Mr. Goswami and Prof. Choudhury, both of them wealthy and beautiful, were sitting side by side before the tea-table. That day in my attempt to rouse their romantic imagination to its proper height, I dressed myself up with a studied negligence. While they were taking tea, I approached my harmonium and began to sing. The purport of the song being,—“The night has come—the night for tryst.” “Where is he now? Tell me, O wind, where shall I meet him?” “The lotus of my love bloomed in the light of his soul;” “Every day I am wasting away my fragrance, only to have a single touch of his body. But, alas, where is he?”

As soon as I had finished, Mr. Goswami eagerly asked me, “But, who is that most fortunate soul?”

“Why, it might be a being in my imagination, the shade of the ideal lover,

who might never appear before me in flesh and blood," I replied.

As soon as I had finished, Mr. Chaudhury pointed his finger backward and said, "well, there he comes in flesh and blood." As I glanced in that direction I saw a human curio dressed up in a curious fashion 'coming along with my vakil friend, gold chain, scented coconut-oil, Atar, spectacles, walking-stick, shawl, full stocking. a pair of lips full of beetle-leave juice—he had every conceivable and inconceivable things with him.

As soon as he stepped into the room he began to chatter, "standing outside we were just listening to your divine music. Oh, you sing like a nymph! Only once I heard such a music and that was from Mati Bibi of Rambagan. As for me, I am a jute merchant, of East Bengal. You will not find a single prostitute in Calcutta who has not swallowed my money. But what I have heard just now, I must confess that I would not hear any more any where. I am not going to leave you once that I have found you. Who are these gentlemen?" With this he paid me a guinea in my compliment.

I looked into the face of my friends and saw suspicious wrinkles in them. In an angry tone immediately I called for the Darwan and ordered him to drive this man out of the door. Losing no time I myself took the task and beckoned him to follow me and reaching him before the gate, I kissed his face and said in whispers, "Never mind, you know I am for you. But you should know to speak the right thing in the right moment. Those people regard me as their sister."

* *

Night began to deepen and with it the love-competition of my rival lovers also began to deepen. They began to rival amongst them in patience. Mr. Goswami placed his gold cigarette case on the table. I took it up, unloaded it of its contents, wrapped it in paper and while putting in into my almirah, said, "Atleast for the sake of this valuable thing you would be forced to meet humble miss Mukerjee once in the evening. The very day, when I would see that I lack your affection, this token of yours would be returned to you."

Mr. Goswami fumbled a little and said, "would that day ever come, when I would

be able to forget, you?" Mr. Choudhury laughed and said, "Well, in that case, I fear the case is not returning to Mr. Goswami's pocket any more."

I noticed that Mr. Goswami was really sorry at this unexpected loss of his gold case. He remained silent for sometime and I thought to break his silence by hitting him in his heart. So I said, "I know what you are musing! Well, you are thinking for going a-hunting for the beautiful cub, in the Lion's den. Is'nt it correct?"

"O' what a fiction!" Was his reply and he was about to depart.

Mr. Choudhury lost no time in retorting, "But, Mr. Goswami, facts are stranger than fictions."

As soon as Mr. Goswami was out, I feigned a great head-ache, with severe palpitation of the heart. As if in great physical torture, I lay half reclined on the sofa and feeling the light to be too hard for my eyes, cried out "Oh, the light, how it hurts my eyes!"

Silently Mr. Choudhury put off the switch. A flood of moon-ray filled the room. Mr.

Choudhury carried his chair near my sofa. As if not meaning anything I caught hold of his hand and placing it over my bosom, said, "You see, Mr. Choudhury, how I have tried Goswami's patience to-night." With this I managed to bring out the ring from his finger and said, "To-night also a trial for you. It is sacrifice alone that can distinguish real love from sham affection." With this as I was humering a love-tune, suddenly the door opened and entered my barrister friend.

He felt the existence of a pair of human being in the moon-light and without making more ado he left the room.

As he shut the door from outside, he said, "Well, let me retire for the night."

As I have said before these two touts were partners in my income. As much as I earn, I did not get any satiety. Even I could not meet all my expenses. Moreover I felt the burden of two partners. One day I called my barrister tout and said, "You are a good-for-nothing fellow. You could not hook any good game. You are to leave Calcutta and try to hook moffussil peoples. That Guha—I mean that East Bengal jute-

merchant. "He gave me a guinea at the first sight and who know what he would pay at the first touch. He is a sound client. Try your luck there."

"For some time my barrister tout was away and when he returned he brought with him a big game. He was a rich man from Assam and he was a bachelor. He had devoted his life to preach celibacy amongst young boys and girls. The very first night he was under our hospitality, he began to preach the story and utility of celibacy. I was used to all these hypocrisies. That night I finished my dinner early as I thought to discuss the ideal of celibacy that night alone with him.

Outside it was midnight. Inside the room the electric fan was moving with high speed and I began the discourse by criticising harshly what the people call the natural attraction for opposite sex. "In this world of 'God,'" I said, "people are often seen in the vile of act creating artifices by which, people are generally drawn together." With this I brought out a packet of Pariss Pictures from the Almirah and began to show him one by one, depicting clearly to him the clever points of the photographer.

Gradually I saw his zeal coming down to a normal level and I saw him devouring my pictures with his two eyes. Then I added, "In marriage and all other human unions these acts of immodesty are shamelessly practised. If you can live the glorious life of a celibate, permit me to help you in your great mission by devoting my life in the vow of celibacy." But he replied, "Have you got any more pictures like these?" I brought the whole treasure out and put it before his amazed eyes. With much eager expectation he drew his chair by me and smiled as he remarked, "O you, false virgin!"

But I seemed to hear nothing and managed to keep aloof from him.

"Why, you have collected these pictures?" he asked.

"If one is to keep oneself at a safe distance from sin, one is to learn at first the real nature of the sin. Hence I have collected all these. But the wonder of it, when all alone I think of those nasty ideas with these pictures before me, it is really shameful to confess that an abominable lust for flesh rises in my bosom. You are a celibate and really I feel a shame to confess before you that,

at that time I feel so much infuriated with passion that it becomes dangerous for me to remain alone with my nearest relative even,

The clock struck three and I proposed for rest. He agreed to it and I arranged for our beds in the same room. I feigned sleep and saw my celibate-friend rolling about in the bed, as if in great torture. I knew that he was a very rich man.

Just to bring the fact to his notice that I was also not sleeping, I said, "I have hired this house at a rent of one hundred rupees per month. If one could spare twenty thousand rupees, we could easily live together as celibates in our own *Ashram* and and preach the right gospel from there. The trouble is, I am to leave this house, last three months. I could not even manage to pay my rent.

Soon I received the intended answer. He said, "If I get a companion-in-work like you, I can spend everything for it" I was assured that the game has been hooked.

He was till then tossing uneasily in the bed and I took the idea to tend my pure

comrade-in-idea, my partner in the life of celibacy. I came near him and said, "Owing to change of place you are being disturbed of your sleep? A little nursing would bring you sleep?" What had I to fear then? He was a pure celibate and I was a pure virgin dedicated to the vow of celibacy! I put his head on my lap and began to finger his hairs. Incidentally as if, I again brought the topics of those Paris Pictures and began to describe one of its contents. It was intolerable for him any more and as I saw him turning his back, I felt a victorious pleasure in me and began to laugh inwardly. We are denizens of hell and we regail in hellish enjoyment. Thus bringing him round to the path of sin, I lay near by him in another bed that night.

Next morning when I arose I saw a different sight before me. Only a day before the man who was quite unknown to me and who had taken a solemn vow not to marry in his life, had miraculously turned into a most submissive slave in a single night. Only the other day, the woman whom he would chuck out without any remorse like a finger smitten by the snake, was the

only idol before his mind. Me, the prostitute Mani, now Miss Mukherjee—without me he lost the salt of life. In the morning he was duly served with tea, biscuits, even the egg of the forbidden bird; but his eyes only searched for me. When I came after finishing my tea, he swallowed up the cold tea at a gulf.

Within two or three months twenty thousand silver coins came into my hand. My body was again bedecked with various valuable ornaments but it was useless. One day, I had to say him—"Well, let me fulfil the vow of celibacy and let you marry and settle down in life" He murmured and said, "But if we are to change the programme you are also to come with me." As I was attempting to cover my ears with both of my hands, my sari fell down in negligence. At this he clasped me like one possessed and impressed a deep kiss on my cheek.

Just a few days after that event he openly proposed to get me in marriage.

"Well, in that case, I cannot say anything. It all depends with my brother-in-law." I said. And my brother-in-law unhesitatingly refused the proposal on the ground that it was

Impossible to marry his educated sister-in-law to an Assamease idiot. He felt the injury, pocketed the insult and disappeared into the place from which he came.

I had heard that that Assamease gentleman was a particular friend of Kûmar Gopika Raman Roy. Often I had heard that my lost lover was being invited by the Kumar. My lover even entreated me to take me there but I had to refuse it. Through him, I once entreated the Kumar to oblige me by once visiting my house but it might be my fault, he never obliged me. Let it not be forgotten that I was not known as a prostitute then.

Much have I written about this sad life of mine. Much have I shown what abominable things man commits being led by passion. There is a strong instinct in man to defile everything that is pure and good. The face that has no cover, never tempts the human soul. Whatever is hidden and forbidden, whatever is dark and polluted drag humanity into thousand maladventures. The woman who publicly seeks sexual pleasure is not the ambition of man. The lady of the harem who shakes at the very shadow of sin, is the tar-get of all our illegal passion.

OF AN EDUCATED FALLEN WOMAN

I spared none. I had also a great influence over the rich Marwarie's that lived in palatial buildings. Much of their money had flown into my cash. Once my Vakil tout hooked a big marwari. At the first sight he said to me, "Bibi Shaheb, those big-bellied marwari women are sickening to me. I donot find any pleasure in them. Beauties of other nationalities are really worth the amusement." He often entreated me to embrace and fondle him and I managed to have a guinea from him everytime I called him as the king of my soul. A kiss was worth two guineas. Once in a garden party I managed to squeeze from him there hundred rupees in a single night. It was quite unknown to me that those people so professed to be the strongest supporter of Hinduism, are so much degraded in their morals, and so base and blind with passion.

The Tea-Party

With my removal to Bhowānipur I was known as Miss Mukherjee. I was no 'Manada' or the Firoza Bibi, neither 'Manidi' even. Every day I began to patch new plans. Tea party was a favourite game with me. Often after the office-hours, my touts used to bring three or four men with him and I could easily choose my game from them after a little conversation. But this was not a very lucrative game and the people that came in this way were not always financially sound. It required the purse of rich men to meet the demands of my touts and have a fair margin for myself.

Hence once I called my Barrister-friend and said, "Let us do one thing. There are the big traders, Vakils, Barrister, Mussiffs, Deputy-magistrates, Zeminders, Leaders, social reformers, School-masters, and our members of the aristocrat families. Select five amongst every group and select those men that have a sound bank balance and invite them to a tea-party."

In four days my barrister-friend prepared a list and showed me. I had to chuck out the names of three persons who were known to me in my former days. One Sunday was fixed for the party. We had the card printed over my signature and send through the Darwan to every address. Not a single School master joined the party and only a single Munsiff joined it but he also left the party before it finished. Political leaders, Vakils and Barristers were the prominent members.

There was an arrangement for a light refreshment. But we had a special arrangement for wine and other drinks. Of course the last item was not freely distributed amongst all. On this occasion I had to sing a Brahmo-song and four more songs of Rabindranath. S; Pradip Kumar Roy also sang a tune. A political leader entreated me to sing national song and I song the following newly composed one,—

“O unwise, you have only clasped our hands, but you have not touched the soul.

You have left the gold outside and locked with utmost care the empty case.

Had you tried to secure these thirty billion of souls as your friend, you could have easily conquered the whole world

But, o unwise, you failed to do it' The song ended in a big political controversy. One of the leaders, in course of the discussion accused Padma Sarker of keeping prostitutes. He brought out all the scandals, all those tales of misconduct and false documentations and proved him to be a villain before all. While Mr Ghosh rose to defend the cause of Mr Sarkar another leader hurled infamy even against Mr Ghosh and he did not hesitate a little to say that it was the affectionate blunder of Deshabandu to raise these men to such a height. The very idea that Deshabandu had blundered repulsed me and I protested the statement and said "To Judge whether Deshabandu had blundered or not is beyond the reach of such ordinary intellect as ours and yours. To fathom the depth of that vast sea is not within the capability of such pigmy intellects as ours. He never entertained any hatred or vengeance, against any particular action. He knew men and for that reason he never hesitated to place these men by him. As a wrestler is required to control the strength of another wrestler, so he had the power to control

this man and utilise him in his proper sphere."

But he persisted in his statement and added, "But he is a traitor, and Deshabandhu did not know of it. Now, it is all out. It was he who secretly divulged all the party-secrets to Maharaja Khounish."

I was really sorry that the paramour of Navo Tara Didi would be publicly defiled as such. So I said, "but whatever might that be you need not step out of the border of decorum! It is not very proper to sling all these mud just in his back. Moreover what's the good of discussing all these things over. It is known to every body and people regard him as such. I had scrupulously avoided inviting him here, just because I know that if they hear him to be coming here many people would not be joining the party then."

Still the man went on saying, "Do you know why people like Biren Sasmal, Jiten Banerjee and Hemanto Sarkar have left the party?" As I understood that things were moving towards an unfavourable direction, I had to persuade him to stop the discourse.

In the meantime Mr. Ghose left the room with my barrister-friend and returned from the other chamber invigorating his nerves with special tonic. He returned and said, "Never mind, Miss Mukerjee, only the other day, I read in a paper from Dacca that a foetus had been found in the dust-bin of a local girls-boarding. Do'nt you think that all these cases of abortion are due to the free mixing of male and female amongst our society? I also came to learn from a gentleman from Dacca that it is not a single case, such cases are quite in numbers."

I argued, "It is not so much for free-mixing. Just see these girls that are reading in the same College with the boys, just see how nicely they behave like brothers and sisters. As if they are fulfilling the great law of nature, everyone is a brother or a sister unto each other." I was there Miss Mukherjee, the enlightened virgin! So I had to support these free mixing against my will. How I knew myself the sad result of such free-mixing! I am a fallen woman only for that!

Mr. Ghosh took up the thread of our discourse and said. "Do you mean to say that all these college students are Yudhis-

thir in-carnate? Do you mean to suggest that they do not feel any transformation in their mind after all day mixing with these full-bodied young girls?"

"There is no measure of standard for every mind," I rejoined. "If some one falls a victim—well, here in lies the harm? In countries that are free and civilized, these things happen oftener. But that makes no difference there?"

"What!" replied Mr. Ghosh, "you want to see India transformed into another America or an England?"

I was at a loss at what should be replied now. But I had not to reply anything, Mr. Ghosh went on saying, "We have heard that the fastidious Heramba Baboo even thinks it immoral to show any man the direction that leads to the theatre, because it would be indirectly helping a man to visit a place where people of questionable characters resort. But if he puts the moral standard of his male and female students to the ballot-examination, perhaps he would know the mental attitude of those students that fill his College-rooms. Perhaps Herambo Babu is not unacquainted with the cases of two Bramho-marriages at Dacca and their

result of free-mixing. Perhaps he is not unacquainted that one of the family had to come back to Hinduism again. Perhaps he is not ignorant of the cases of Ramala Gupta, Lilabati and others. Well, Ramala Gupta was a member of their Society even!"

I did not like that this discourse should continue, moreover it was getting late at night. Gradually everyone bade good-night except one young man clad in Khadder. He is still maintaining his celibacy—and he is known to many as a very pure young man. If celibates like him and 'virgins' like me develope in numbers in our country, God only knows, where our Country would be led to!

The Garden Party.

Myself a prostitute—over and above that I had to pose as a virgin lady of a respectable family. These false masks soon tired my soul. By this time I had also collected a few thousands and I thought to give up the profession. But my touts were quite at a loss to hear of my project and it was through their persistent appeal that I had to stick to the profession in spite of my will.

Many 'a time' Ranimashi had persuaded me to sell my body, and I would not accuse her for that, because it was her profession. But when I thought of my educated touts—sons of respectable families and holding university degrees—urging me to stick to the profession I felt inwardly sorry for the country that had produced them. Those respectable educated people who earn their livelihood as touts of prostitutes—and who even tempt her to stick to it even if she wished to come out of it—are they to be called educated and respectable? Often have I seen even in the society of prostitutes that if anyone of them

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seriously thought of giving up this life of shame and infamy, they would help her in doing so. But these sons of gentlemen, what are they? The other day the well-to-do prostitute Chuni of Rambagan committed suicide in her own room by hanging herself. She had left a letter in which was written the reason of her suicide. "This life of a prostitute has sickened my soul." She wrote. She had also implored other prostitutes to give up the shameful life. The agony of the soul that one is to feel when doomed to live on a profession which the heart abhors, cannot be explained to any other soul. One day my vakiltout proposed, "At Dum-Dum in the Garden of..... ..Babu we would arrange for another party". "Why at Dum-Dum, if it is at all necessary, why not arrange it in our house," I said. He did not accept my proposal and argued that it is convenient to hold these parties in a garden and he began to arrange for it. Cards were again used over my name but this time I did not know the list of the people invited. One does not feel any enthusiasm in the work that is against one's will. On the day fixed for the occasion I drove to Dum-Dum in my own car. My barrister-friend was himself driver and I took my seat by him.

At the garden I saw twenty to twenty-five men assembled, both Hindus and Mahomedans. Some youngmen, clad in Khaddar was busy in arranging the party. On enquiry I came to learn that they were the people of.....Babu at whose cost the party had been arranged. The Babu who was financing the party was also clad in Khadder and had a sandel on. The dress did not satisfy me. While living in the prostitute quarters, I had the experience of many middle-aged gentlemen dressed like this, who did not pay upto our expectation. Just as the police officials manage to do without money in those quarters on the strength of their uniform, so these Khadder clad nationalists tried to do with as little money as they could, their argument being, "Well, we have dedicated our lives to the cause of our country, where shall we get money?" Many poets and literaturists often visit those quarters in search of materials for their Realistic Art and demand the the pleasure in exchange of their fine phrases. At least no business man would resent my dissatisfaction at that peculiar dress.

I had to sing a song for courtesey's sake. After that two guests also sang. The topics developed on forceful abduction of women.

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Everyone present vigorously protested against it and particularly laid stress on the fact that Mussalmans as a class are silent over this great issue. As a reply to the charge, a Mahomedan gentleman said many things, the purport of his whole speech being—It is not the fault of Mahomedans, that Hindu women invariably abduct with the Mahomedan; Maulavi Akram Khan also voiced such an opinion in the protest-meeting convened by them. I showed him the paper that was issued only a few days before the party was arranged and that contained the news of the abduction of daughter of Abdul Rahim, an educated gentleman and overseer of Mymensingh and the torture of the wife of Golam Shaheb of Katihadi Thana. I asked him, "Are they Hindus? or Hindus have seduced them away. Would you please entreat Akram Khan Shaheb to think more ere he replies? Mussalmans never tried so seriously to rescue the daughter of Abdul Rahim, as did the Hindus with all their heart and soul. Mr. Ghosal, the man in charge of the Thana, was a Hindu, and what he arranged for the rescue may simply be called to ransake the whole of India. "Moulavi Shaheb evaded the point and suddenly raised the fact of the marriage of the soldier-poet Kazi Nazru

Islam and argued that it were the Hindus that were guilty for the marriage. He added, "Surely Nazrul would not have dared to put the proposal to her brother, 'if the brother:.....'" I interrupted him and said. "It is very improper to discuss about any marriage that had been made under strict codes in whatever religion it may be So-I implore you not to discuss about it."

At this the Moulavi Shahab felt a bit angry but remained silent. Inwardly I knew that it was also the inevitable result of free mixing and if it stand a little more test of time, I hope it would live for ever.

But our Moulavi Shahab was more impertinent than I thought him to be. He said, "Well; what lies behind fact, that now-a-days, girls of your society, that freely walk on the open road, wilfully shun to cover with Sari a particular right-hand side of their body?"

I bowed low in shame. What am I to reply to this charge! The particular portion of the body that even prostitutes try to hide under the Sari when on road, are made to remain almost bare by the daughters and wives of respectability and they have accepted it as a fashion. But I had to pose

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called 'advanced society'. I remembered those thousand instances where virgin girls unable to with stand the first onslaughts of youth gave them selves up to illegal satisfaction of their lust and were forced to take shelter in our quarters. Those who were not able to hide their shameful deeds and were forced to come to this profession, are only a small fraction of our society. How many instances of these illegal love are brought to publicity? It is only two against thousand cases that are reported.

I said "In the natural course of time as the girl attends to puberty, she readily awakens into sex-consciousness. It is necessary that she should be married before that."

"We did not expect such a reply from Miss Mukherjee," said the Moulavi.

"It is not I alone" I replied, "if you approach those ladies that marched the other-day towards the Town Hall to lend their support to the Sarda Act, and ask their opinion aside, they themselves would reply in the same language that I have said."

I could not check myself anymore and cited the Dacca-girls-boarding abortion-case and the illegal marriages of the Das and Guha family. I also referred to the fact of the

ill-temper and said. "Well, I am not going to talk to the man who cannot even speak with proper respect for ladies!"

As a protest of my words, some prominent Mahomedan guests left the place, only two or three of them remained.

My tout introduced one of them as a special friend of the organiser of the party and a notable worker in the cause of Hindu-moslem unity. But it took no time to probe into his heart and know his intention. I called my tout aside and said, "It is really shameful! This very night I will leave the profession. What made you to bring these men here whom I loathed to entertain even then when I lived in the prostitute-quarters? You have not a grain of sense in you!" My tout replied, "But you see, without entertaining them you could not expect Hindu-muslem unity, hence it was necessary that they should be invited in the garden party." Of course all this was between ourselves. The man seemed to be of refined taste.

Just at this point, some one protested against the Sarda Act. I had no other way but to join it. I forgot the fact that I was as an educated woman of the so-

called advanced society. I remembered those thousand instances where virgin girls unable to with stand the first onslaughts of youth gave them selves up to illegal satisfaction of their lust and were forced to take shelter in our quarters. Those who were not able to hide their shameful deeds and were forced to come to this profession, are only a small fraction of our society. How many instances of these illegal love are brought to publicity? It is only two against thousand cases that are reported.

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Shastras I do not know, neither do I care to know, but I want to know where is that bold virgin who would refuse the cup of nectar year by year when her throat is perched with thirst? Well, there is England and America—what we find there? Twenty out of every hundred girl-students there become a mother before their marriage! But this does not compel them to live the life of an out-cast. If India is to be Americanised, well, that is another thing!

Moulavi Shaheb referred to the fact of the Albert Hall Meeting in support of the Sarda Act and said, 'Two to three hundred ladies assembled there and carried a resolution to have also the divorce act enacted.'

sexual aspect of our society, are the greatest enemy of the country. Moreover when we are getting Swaraj soon, why not wait and have patience for some time only?"

From that day I took unto a vow to leave this profession. I have not yet been able to control my passions but, I would dedicate my life in doing so. I altogether have given up the profession. Whatever lease of life is before me, I would easily manage to live with the money that I have. Who knows when the lamp of life might be extinguished, —my money might not even serve my cause. My touts implored me to prepare a will and I ordered them to construct a dummy. When it was made I saw that it was written in the dummy that these two touts would become the legal inheritors of all my property after my death. I said, "That can never be. After my death all my property would be utilised in the cause of the depressed and fallen societies. The unclaimed property of the prostitute is absorbed by the Government after her death and thus it cannot serve their purpose. Hence some of the prostitutes of Calcutta have dedicated their property to institutions that look after the cause of Hinduism. I thought to follow that path."

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'I knew not what to answer to this. Only I thought, "Alas, ye Hindu ladies! Where are you leading to? Do you intend to transform the whole of India into a bigger Sonagachi?" But I said, when anybody is not forcing anyone to compel the girl to be married before fourteen, and if you think it worth the trouble educate the country to accept that standard. Otherwise those people that are inviting the Police to regulate the

sexual aspect of our society, are the greatest enemy of the country. Moreover when we are getting Swaraj soon, why not wait and have patience for some time only?"

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